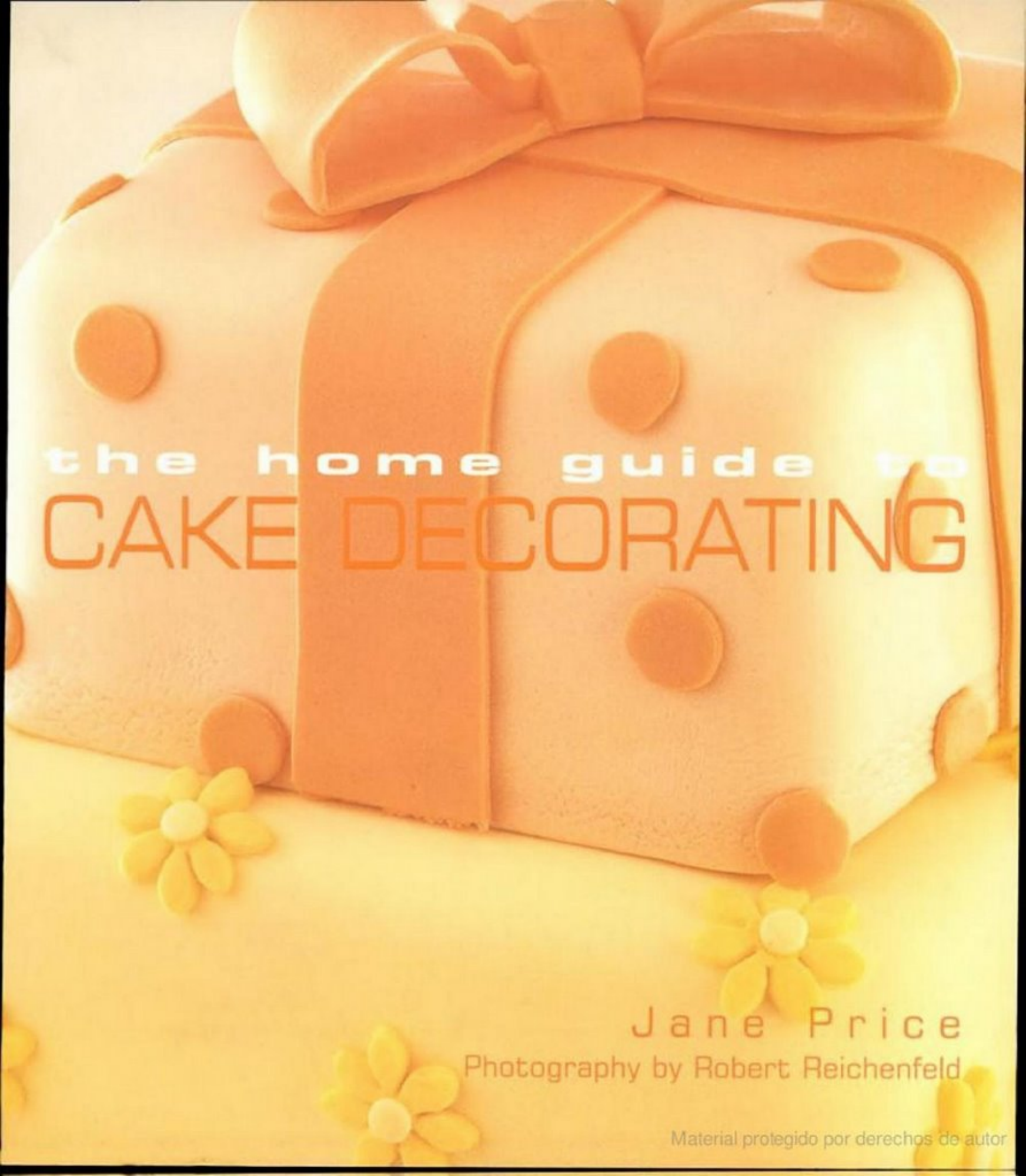

the home guide to CAKE DECORATING

Jane Price
Photography by Robert Reichenfeld

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Cake decorating is a fabulous mixture of cookery and art, a blend of relaxation and excitement, with a sprinkling of inspiration, precise care and reckless use of the imagination all thrown in for good measure. *The Home Guide to Cake Decorating* will lead a newcomer through the simplest basics of this wonderful, colourful pastime, but also contains great ideas and fantastic creations to inspire experienced sugarcrafters. If you have never baked before, but want to make a teddy-bear's picnic for your toddler's birthday, or if you are planning a three-tiered traditional cake with sugar roses for a family wedding, or if you would just like to bake a luscious chocolate gateau for tea with friends, this is the book to show you how to do it.

£12.99

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the home guide to CAKE DECORATING

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Photography by Robert Reichenfeld

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Cake decorating through the centuries

Cakes have been baked and decorated for several thousand years, initially to appease angry gods and then as a celebration of special occasions. We carry this tradition with us into the third millennium.

Christmas cakes began life as Twelfth Night cakes.

It is difficult to put an exact date on when baking, cake making and decorating began, although it is thought that the Babylonians taught the Egyptians the art of baking. A painted panel dated at around 1175 BC, depicting the court bakery of Rameses III, illustrates the preparation of several types of cakes, as well as some bread. There are also indications that confectionery sweetened with sugar was on sale in Egypt around 700 BC.

Today we serve specially decorated cakes to celebrate many different occasions: weddings, christenings, engagements, anniversaries, birthdays and Christmas. Christmas cakes have a long history and were baked by the rich in the eighteenth century as Twelfth Night cakes. A bean and a pea would be hidden and baked in the rich fruit mixture. Whoever found the bean was crowned 'king of the feast' and the finder of the pea 'queen of the feast'. But it is wedding cakes that have the longest tradition and the story of their changing development that best illustrates the history of cake decorating as an art.

Crowning the bride

The tradition of creating special cakes for weddings reaches back to Roman times. A small and basic fruit cake would be made from food that was traditionally offered as an appeasement to the gods—rich fruit, nuts and tiny honey cakes. This cake would be crumbled over the bride's head so that the gods would bless her with abundance—the tradition known as 'crowning the bride'.

This tradition was brought to Britain by Julius Caesar in 54 BC and became part of local custom. At first, it was only the wealthy families who could afford to adopt the practice, with the poorer families scattering grains of wheat or corn over the bride, in the hopes of fertility.

Crowning the bride continued until a mere 200 years ago. Now

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He remarks in his book, *Advanced Piping and Modelling*, that at this time very little 'net or string work', as he described it, was done in Britain. Schulbe's book shows us that the modelling tools we know today were in use in the late nineteenth century, though made of bone rather than of plastic. Flowers were modelled in a similar fashion, including the use of stamens. The paste used was a mixture of marzipan and gum paste. Brass crimpers, very similar to those on sale today, were also used.

The groom's cake

Even after it became common practice to ice wedding cakes with sugar in the late seventeenth century, the cake would still be crumbled over the bride's head... the icing, in fact, making this ritual easier. The sugar would crumble and could be showered over the bride while the rest of the cake was left to be eaten. Eventually, the bride's family began to prepare two cakes for the feast: one for the crowning and one highly decorated creation to appeal to those who had discovered a taste for sugar icing. These became known as the bride's and the groom's cakes.

The tradition of crowning the bride continued until just before the reign of Victoria and it was then that the 'groom's cake', a dark fruit cake, was cut into pieces to be taken home by the guests. The 'bride's cake' (made from a lighter mixture but more highly decorated) would be served as a dessert at the wedding feast.

The last century

Today's cakes can be eight feet high and covered in flowers, fountains of champagne, figures of the bride and groom or whatever else takes their fancy.

Since the early twentieth century, cakes have been raised in layers on pillars. Originally it was only royalty and high society who could afford these tiered cakes, with the rest of the country having single cakes decorated with perhaps a vase to add height to the display. The three-tiered round cake became traditional, representing the three rings—the engagement, wedding and eternity rings. Soon the request for a three-tiered cake became fashionable among the style-conscious middle classes, even if there was more cake than was actually needed for the guests. Consequently, there was often a tier left over and, rather than use it immediately, it would be kept for the christening of the couple's first child.

Very little was published on cake decorating between the two World Wars. The Second World War, with its severe sugar rationing in the United Kingdom, reduced the number of books being published on the subject still further and icing practice became very difficult. Mashed potato was used to keep piping skills honed. One pound of icing would be used for a whole cake decorating class, for weeks at a time.

Although there were sugar restrictions in the colonies during the War, they were not quite as stringent as in the United Kingdom. Sugarpaste was the preferred covering of rich fruit cakes in countries like Australia and South Africa. But, in Britain, the master bakers continued with their favourite technique—royal icing. Ronnie Rock, one of the greatest craftsmen in this field, actually ground his own icing (confectioners') sugar to produce the magnificent piece he made for the first post-war exhibition in 1946. It is now displayed at London's National Bakery School.

The custom of the bride and groom cutting the cake together began in the 1930s when British cakes were encased in several layers of hard royal icing to hold up the pillared layers. Grooms

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the ritual has been split into two parts. Rice or confetti is thrown over the bride to encourage fertility and each guest is given a slice of cake (girls were supposed to sleep with a slice of the cake under their pillows to induce dreams of future husbands).

The first decorations

Although they were not yet served at weddings, decorated cakes made their first appearance in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. Most were adorned with moulded almond paste. The food of this era was becoming exotic and extravagant, with the new culinary discoveries brought back from around the empire. Sweetmeats were served in dishes moulded from a form of pastillage. Extraordinary banquet centre-pieces were brought out to amaze and delight noble guests.

At this stage, wedding cakes were baked as tiny separate cakes, more like buns with a sticky coating of almond paste. Some would be crumbled over the bride, some squeezed through her wedding ring, some eaten by guests and some thrown to the poor folk outside the feast. The remainder were built into a pile and set before the new husband and wife, who were expected to kiss over the pile of cakes. This would hopefully bless them with prosperity and many children. It would not be long before this unruly pile of sticky almond paste-covered buns would be converted into one large cake.

When Charles II returned in 1660 from exile in France to reclaim the English throne, he brought with him a love of French cooking and some of his favourite French pastry chefs. It was these men who, finding the piles of almond buns unappetizing and unattractive to their trained eyes, suggested they should be iced with a crust of sugar and then adorned with trinkets.

Once the idea of decorating the cake with trinkets had been embraced, there was a rush by all the great chefs of Europe to create more fantastical decorations. Competition was enormous, with every chef wanting to create something fit for the king's table. Sugar sculpting began in Italy in the seventeenth century: Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini used sugar to create works of art for special occasions. However, not until the 1760s were all the constituents of our present-day celebration cakes put together. The first edition of Mrs Raffald's book *The Experienced English Housekeeper* (1769) contains three successive recipes for a rich cake, marzipan and icing.

Ribbon is often used to trim both cake and board.

The most celebrated confectioner of this time was Antoine Carême. His book *Patissier Royal* is illustrated with engravings showing that he used a form of pastillage for his highly structured cakes and desserts. It is he who likened the art of the confectioner to that of the architect and, in fact, took many of his ideas from architectural drawings. A similar recipe for pastillage was given in Frederick Nutt's book *The Complete Confectioner*, published in 1819.

In 1894 Ernest Schulbe first competed at the London Exhibition.

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Equipment

Cake decorating is easier and quicker, and you will achieve more professional results, if you have the right tools for the job. All are available from specialist decorating suppliers.

1 Modelling tools Used to draw on, shape, frill or hollow out soft surfaces such as sugarpaste, modelling paste, flower paste or marzipan. From left: anger tool, bone-end tool, dresden tool and scalpel.
2 Metal ruler Used to spread royal icing smoothly for a perfect surface.
3 Turntable Enables the cake to be turned easily during royal icing or intricate side piping, but a round cake tin can be used instead. A tilting turntable is a good investment if you enjoy extension work.
4 Ribbon insertion tool Small tool for cutting short, straight holes in soft paste and inserting short lengths of ribbon simultaneously.
5 Glass-head pins Pins are often used in cake decorating and these, with their large tops, are easy to see and so won't get left in icing.
6 Veining tool Marks veins on leaves when rolled over soft paste or icing. Also creates a textured finish on soft icing.
7 Ball tool Used for modelling or making sugar flowers, for smoothing the edges of petals or rounding the centres.
8 Quilting (tailor's or stitching) wheels These are used to create a line of 'stitches' on soft icing. Can have removable wheels in different sizes.
9 Icing smoother Used to smooth the surface of sugarpaste- or marzipan-covered cakes. For best results, use one in each hand.
10 Mini rolling pin Available in plastic or wood and used to roll out small amounts of icing or paste for modelling or making sugar flowers.
11 Palette knives Indispensable equipment for cake decorating. Used to spread icing or lift small pieces of dried icing such as runouts or lace.
12 Foam pad (celpad) Provides a soft surface for fine modelling and making sugar flowers. Ideal when using a ball tool or plunger cutters.
13 Ribbed rolling pin Used to create a regular grooved imprint on soft icings. Necessary for smocking on sugarpaste.
14 Celsticks Available in different sizes for fine modelling work and making sugar flowers. The pointed end is used to open up centres of flowers, while the rounded end is used to soften or frill petal edges.
15 Piping bags Make your own from baking paper or buy jaconette, nylon, plastic or disposable bags. A screw attachment can be added to the end of a fabric bag to make changing the tube easier.

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would 'help' the bride cut the cake, using a sword or knife. In those days this would almost unfailingly have been a large hard white cake with some piped decoration. It would perhaps have been decorated with horse-shoes (for good luck) and tiny bride's shoes (representing the giving away of the bride to the groom by her father and the idea of a possession—historically a shoe left on a piece of land symbolized ownership).

In the last thirty years, there have been many changes in the fashion for wedding cakes. Soft sugarpaste icing became popular and with it the creation of new techniques taken from needle-work, such as smocking and ribbon insertion. Sugarpaste is often imagined to be a modern invention but, in fact, the first recipe for sugarpaste was published in 1609 in a book entitled *Delights for Ladies*. This paste was made from 'fine white sugar, starch and gum tragacanth', coloured and flavoured with pounded flowers.

It is this movement in trends for the decoration of wedding cakes that sets the fashions for styles of christening, birthday and anniversary cakes. Today we realise that with imagination and practice, almost anything is achievable.

Today we celebrate many occasions with a cake.

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1 Pillars Use solid pillars, or hollow pillars slipped over wooden dowels, to support tiers. A huge variety of shapes and sizes are available, mainly in plastic, although these can easily be covered.

2 Paintbrushes Textures range from soft to hard and sizes vary. Used to paint with food colouring or dust finished pieces with powder colours.

3 Piping tubes (tips or nozzles) The lower the number, the finer the tube (with 0000 being the finest). Star, basketweave and leaf tubes also available. Can be made from plastic or metal, with or without screw attachments.

4 Lace mould Leaves a decorative lace impression when rolled or pressed over soft icing.

5 Dusting chalks Non-toxic chalks for colouring dried icing. Scrape the chalk off the sticks and dust over with a brush. Soften the colour by mixing with a little cornflour (cornstarch).

6 Crimpers Used to pinch together the edges of soft icing to give a decorative effect. Resemble large tweezers.

7 Stamens Used for flower centres or to assemble tiny plunger flowers. Packets of assorted colours and sizes available.

8 Florist's wire Covered flexible wire. The thickness is expressed as a gauge number—softer wire has a higher gauge number and is used for smaller pieces (so you would use 33-gauge for small flowers and 24-gauge for larger flowers).

9 Flower cutters For cutting whole small flower shapes. Available in many different varieties. Graduating in size and available in metal or plastic.

10 Plunger flower cutters Tiny flower cutters with a plunger attached, to cut out and shape with one movement.

11 Leaf veiner Plastic pads marked with realistic leaf texture for imprinting the surface of soft paste sugar leaves.

12 Petal cutters Can be bought with one side for cutting petals and the other for cutting leaves (as shown). Available in metal or plastic.

13 Wooden cake dowels Long thin cylinders of wood with one pointed end, used to support cake tiers but also helpful for modelling.

14 Leaf cutters Available in many different shapes and variety of leaf. Graduating in size and available in metal or plastic.

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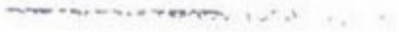

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Before you start

Cake decorating is not difficult, but it is something that requires patience, time and attention to detail. Like most skills, your results will get better with practice, but, before you attempt to make the recipes in this book, read the following hints, tips and instructions.

Tins need to be lined before the cake mixture is poured in.

Always read through the recipe from start to finish before you begin. In fact, before you even start to prepare and shop for your ingredients. This is important whatever you are cooking but in cake decorating, which can be time-consuming and require specialist equipment, it is absolutely vital.

How to use this book

The first five chapters in this book will lead you through the basics and techniques of cake decorating. The following five chapters feature decorating ideas for cakes that you can make once you have baked your basic cake (see the final chapter), made the basic icings and understood the initial techniques. Because these initial techniques are the same for almost every recipe, we simply state in the method 'cover the cake with marzipan and leave to dry', 'cover the cake with sugarpaste' or 'cover the cake board' etc. You will need to turn back to the specific pages showing these techniques (pages 26–35) if you are just starting off and need fuller instructions. So, when you are covering a cake with royal icing, don't forget that you will need all the equipment associated with that technique, such as an icing ruler and side scraper, as well as the equipment listed in the actual recipe.

On pages 422–427 of this book there is a glossary of cake decorating terms. Do not forget to refer to this when you are unsure of an ingredient or instruction.

The cakes appear in general order of difficulty in each chapter, so those at the start of the chapter are easy and suitable for beginners, while those at the end are harder and often employ more advanced techniques. This, of course, is subjective, in that you may have a talent for piping with royal icing but not be able to cover a cake neatly with sugarpaste. If you are a complete beginner it is probably best to start by making some of the

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gateaux, using cream, chocolate and fruit, before you move on to the iced cakes. Cakes covered with buttercream are also easy for beginners—if you make any mistakes you can simply smooth them over and start again. You can even put buttercream in a piping bag and use it to practise your icing techniques.

Kitchen cupboard

At the beginning of each recipe you will find a list of ingredients (food-stuffs required) and equipment necessary to make the cake photographed. We assume you will have the basics in your kitchen cupboard and so, for reasons of space and practicality, these are not stated in the ingredients or equipment lists. These include icing (confectioners') sugar and cornflour (cornstarch) for rolling out icings or modelling or flower paste. (A hint for using these: make a bag from muslin, or even a clean stocking, and fill with icing sugar or cornflour, then use it as a sort of 'powder puff' for dusting surfaces.) You will obviously need a rolling pin and a selection of greaseproof, non-stick baking and parchment papers for lining and tracing templates and plastic wrap for preventing icing drying out. You will need mixing bowls, cake tins, sharp knives and, if you are going to do much decorating, you will probably also want to buy a scalpel and a kit of tools. If there is any equipment with which you are unfamiliar, turn to the equipment pictures on pages 10–13. You may find that the particular item is sold under a different name where you live.

For many recipes you will need paper piping bags. Instructions on how to make these are given on page 48. Often you can just snip the end off the paper piping bag but for more intricate piping with royal icing you will require piping tubes (also called tips or nozzles). You will find these tubes listed in the equipment list for each recipe, and you will probably need to buy a few in graduating sizes.

Also listed are food colourings. For many cakes the colouring will be completely subjective and the colours we have listed are merely a guide for making the cake as pictured. For other cakes, such as the Christmas painted cakes, you may need to follow the colourings more exactly and perhaps have several shades of each colour available for giving a natural result. This is why the ingredients list may state 'greens and browns' under food colourings—you may need a couple of shades of each. Once again, read through the recipe first to see what is required.

Cover plain cake boards with paper or fabric.

Timing

It cannot be stressed too often that good cake decorators need to be organized people. They need to have read the recipe from start to finish and checked they have all the equipment needed. If several cake tins are needed, these could be borrowed and special shaped tins can be hired from decorating shops. Provision needs to be made for baking several cakes that may not all fit in the oven at the same

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Marzipan is used underneath both royal icing and sugarpaste.

time. And remember, while sponge cakes are fairly quick to prepare and bake, fruit cakes or large chocolate cakes can take quite a bit of time both in the mixing and in the baking.

Timing is crucial to cake decorating. The basic cake is usually baked, allowed to cool and then covered with both marzipan and sugarpaste or royal icing. It may then need to be left to dry for three days before the next stage of decorating. If a cake is then to be royal iced, it has to be left to dry between each coat. So, as you can see, the whole process can take several days and a lot of organization.

The basic cake

You will find the cake size required for the recipe listed first on the ingredients list. This will say 'two 30 cm (12 inch) round cakes' or '18 cm (7 inch) square cake' but will not usually specify what type of cake to use because for most recipes you can use any of the basic cakes you like. The recipes for the basic cakes will tell you how to make all the cakes in all the sizes listed in the recipes. However, even if you would like to have chocolate mud cake every time, you do need to think about a few factors before you choose the basic cake.

Most wedding cakes are traditionally fruit cakes. This is for historical reasons (the dark fruit cake was originally known as the 'groom's cake' and was cut up and sent home with the guests, while the 'bride's cake' would be lighter and crumbled over her head to ensure fertility and good luck) but there are also practical reasons. Fruit cakes store well (in fact, their flavour matures with age) and this is important for wedding cakes for several reasons. Firstly, wedding cakes can take a long time to decorate and so need to be baked well in advance and left to sit for a long time while icings dry. Secondly, some people still like to save the top tier of the cake to celebrate the christening of a first child or their first wedding anniversary. Thirdly, if you are making a tiered cake using dowels and pillars you will find it needs to be fairly dense and heavy and this usually means a fruit cake is best. If you love chocolate cake and want to make it the base for your wedding cake, you need to decorate it much closer to the

Piping tubes come in a wide variety of sizes. The smaller the tube, the finer the piping work will be.

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time of the wedding and you won't be able to store it for as long. A compromise is to make the top tier fruit cake and the other tiers in your other choice.

It is traditional to make Christmas cakes from fruit cakes but christening and birthday cakes can be made from just about anything you want, as long as you're not intending to store them for too long. Storage times can be found at the end of all the basic cake recipes.

Some of the modelled and sculpted cakes (such as the piano on page 196 or the dream castle on page 193) do have to be made from Madeira cakes as they need to be firm and stand up well. Many of the children's cakes are not suitable for fruit cakes... fruit cake and buttercream is a clash of flavours. The introductory notes to the recipes will guide you if any specific cake should be used.

If you are using an unusual shaped tin and aren't sure what quantity of the basic cake mixture to make, you can measure the volume of the tin using water. Fill a 20 cm (8 inch) round tin with water and then pour into the shaped tin until filled. That way you can calculate how many quantities of the basic 20 cm (8 inch) mixture are needed to fill the tin.

Serving quantities

We haven't put serving quantities on our cake recipes because these can be so subjective. Obviously, the richer the cake, the smaller the slice that will be wanted. But as a rough guide, a fruit cake is usually cut into small fingers, about 2.5 cm (1 inch). So a basic 23 cm (9 inch) cake will serve around 10 people, one 18 x 25 cm (7 x 10 inch) oval cake will serve 20–30 people and a two-tiered cake (one 30 cm/12 inch and one 15 cm/6 inch round cake) will serve 70–80 people as a wedding cake. If you're feeding small children, you will hopefully be able to serve more with that size cake.

If you particularly like one of the smaller cakes, or are running on a tight budget for either finances or time, you can make the 'real' cake and also make a 'kitchen' cake. This is a larger cake that is simply covered with marzipan and sugarpaste or royal icing (to match the 'real' cake) and can be cut behind the scenes and brought out on plates after the 'real' cake is cut. This is useful for large gatherings.

Adapting the recipes

Cake decorating is an art, a talent and a passion and those who are passionate about their topic will have the experience and equipment to adapt most of these recipes in any way they choose. So, cakes that are royal iced can be covered with sugarpaste if you find it easier, colours of icings and decorations can change and modelling figures can change their features and clothes and be personalized. In fact, you will probably find that the more personal you can make your cakes, the better.

Sugar flowers and leaves are not difficult to make.

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Basic icing recipes

Marzipan

Royal icing

Marzipan

750 g (1½ lb) icing (confectioners') sugar
200 g (6½ oz) ground almonds
2 egg yolks
2 tablespoons sweet sherry
2 teaspoons glycerine
1 tablespoon lemon juice
few drops almond essence

1 Sift the icing sugar into a large bowl. Remove a cupful for kneading. Stir the almonds into the icing sugar and make a well in the centre. Mix together the egg yolks, sherry, glycerine, lemon juice and almond essence and pour into the well. Stir with a knife until stiff.
2 Use the reserved sugar to dust a work surface and knead the marzipan for 3–5 minutes, adding more sugar to prevent sticking. Knead until smooth and pliable.
3 Use immediately or wrap in plastic and store in an airtight container in a cool place (not the fridge) for up to 3 days. Roll out on a surface dusted with icing sugar to use.
Makes 1 kg (2 lb)

Royal icing

7 egg whites, or 45 g (1½ oz) albumen powder dissolved in 315 ml (10 fl oz) water and strained
1.75 kg (3½ lb) icing (confectioners') sugar, sifted

1 Put the egg white or albumen in the bowl of an electric mixer (see Note). Stir in the sugar. Beat on slow speed for 4 minutes for 'soft peak' or 5 minutes for 'firm peak'.
2 'Soft peak' will be the first consistency reached and is used for coating cakes and piping with tubes. When lifted from the bowl with a spatula the peak will stand up but droop slightly at the tip.
3 For 'firm peak' icing, beat until the icing has a definite peak that will not fall when shaken.
Makes enough to cover a 22 cm (9 inch) cake, make decorations and cover a board

Note To make a smaller quantity by hand: use 2 egg whites or dissolve 30 g (1 oz) albumen powder in 4 tablespoons water, then strain. Place in a large bowl. Add 500 g (1 lb) icing sugar, a tablespoon at a time, beating constantly. It will take about 20 minutes to reach soft-peak consistency.

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Sugarpaste

Chocolate sugarpaste

Sugarpaste

5 teaspoons gelatine
125 ml (4 fl oz) liquid glucose
1 tablespoon glycerine
1 kg (2 lb) icing (confectioners') sugar

1 Sprinkle the gelatine over 3 tablespoons water in a small bowl. Leave until the gelatine is spongy. Place the bowl in a pan of hot water and stir until the gelatine has dissolved. Add the glucose and glycerine and stir until melted. Cool for 1 minute.
2 Sift the icing sugar into a large bowl. Remove a cupful for kneading. Make a well in the centre of the icing sugar and pour in the gelatine mixture. Combine with a wooden spoon, then use a dry hand to knead until the icing has a dough-like texture, adding a little of the reserved icing sugar if necessary. Turn out onto a work surface dusted with icing sugar and knead until smooth and pliable, adding more icing sugar as necessary to prevent sticking.
3 Use immediately, or wrap in plastic and store in an airtight container in a cool place (not the fridge) for up to 3 days. Roll out on a surface dusted with icing sugar to use.
Makes 1 kg (2 lb)

Chocolate sugarpaste

500 g (1 lb) good-quality chocolate
150 ml (5 fl oz) liquid glucose
50 ml (1¾ fl oz) sugar syrup (see Note)
about 600 g (1¼ lb) sugarpaste

1 Chop the chocolate and put it in a heatproof bowl over a pan of hot water—don't let the bowl touch the water. Stir occasionally until the chocolate has melted.
2 Combine the glucose and sugar syrup in a bowl and place this in another bowl of hot water. Stir until just warm, then add to the chocolate. Stir with a wooden spoon. Cover and store at room temperature for 24 hours before using. Do not refrigerate.
3 Before using, knead lightly to make pliable. Knead the chocolate paste with an equal weight of sugarpaste on a surface dusted with icing sugar and it is now ready to use. Roll out between sheets of plastic thicker than plastic wrap.
Makes 1.5 kg (3 lb)

Note For sugar syrup, mix 6 tablespoons sugar in 5 tablespoons water, bring to the boil and boil for 3 minutes. Cool to room temperature. Store at room temperature in a glass container with a tight lid.

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Modelling paste

Modelling chocolate

Modelling paste

280 g (9 oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

3 teaspoons gum tragacanth

1 teaspoon liquid glucose

315 g (10 oz) sugarpaste

1 Sift together the icing sugar and gum tragacanth. Add the glucose and 6 teaspoons cold water and mix well. Knead to form a soft dough, then combine with an equal weight of sugarpaste.
2 If the paste is too dry, knead in a little white vegetable fat (vegetable shortening or 'Copha') or egg white. If the paste is too sticky, knead in a little cornflour (cornstarch). Roll out on a surface dusted with cornflour and do fine work with a tiny smear of white vegetable fat on your fingers.
Makes about 325 g (11 oz)

Modelling chocolate

125 g (4 oz) dark, milk or white chocolate

2 tablespoons liquid glucose, warmed

1 Melt the chocolate in a heat-proof bowl over a pan of hot water (don't let the base of the bowl sit in the water). Remove from the heat and stir in the glucose until the mixture is just combined.
2 Put the paste in a plastic bag and chill for 1 hour or until firm but pliable.
3 Can be kept, tightly wrapped in the bag, in a cool place for several weeks. Break off pieces as required and knead until pliable. Roll out on a surface dusted with cornflour (cornstarch).
Makes about 180 g (6 oz)

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Flower paste

Pastillage

Flower paste

2 teaspoons gelatine

2 teaspoons liquid glucose

3 teaspoons white vegetable fat (shortening)

500 g (1 lb) icing (confectioners') sugar

3 teaspoons gum tragacanth

1 egg white

1 Mix the gelatine and 5 teaspoons water in a bowl and leave for 1 hour. Stand over a pan of hot water and stir until dissolved. Add the glucose and white fat and continue to stir over heat until melted and combined.

2 Sift the sugar and gum tragacanth into a mixer bowl. Add the gelatine mix and egg white and beat at low speed until combined. Increase to high and beat for 5 minutes until white and stringy. Put in a plastic bag and then an airtight container. Refrigerate for 24 hours.

3 Knead well before use with hands lightly greased with white vegetable fat. If the paste is dry, knead in a little egg white. If too sticky, add a little icing sugar. This paste can be cut into small pieces and frozen.

Makes about 500 g (1 lb)

Pastillage

1 teaspoon gum tragacanth

500 g (1 lb) sugarpaste

1 Knead the gum tragacanth into the sugarpaste. Store in a plastic bag in an airtight container for 24 hours before using. Roll out on a work surface dusted with a little cornflour (cornstarch).

Makes 500 g (1 lb)

Note In many cases it is probably not worth making your own pastillage (a modelling paste). Buy an instant dry-mix type that you simply mix with water.

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Buttercream

Chocolate frosting

Buttercream

125 g (4 oz) unsalted butter, softened

250 g (8 oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

2 teaspoons boiling water

1 Beat the butter with electric beaters until light and fluffy. Gradually add the icing sugar, beating well after each addition. Add the water and beat well.

2 Buttercream can be frozen for up to 3 months. Defrost in the fridge for a day before using.

Makes enough to cover and fill a 22 cm (9 inch) round cake

Variations

Citrus buttercream Beat in 2 teaspoons finely grated lemon, orange or lime rind.

Coffee buttercream Dissolve 4 teaspoons instant coffee in the 2 teaspoons of boiling water before adding.

Almond Beat 1 teaspoon almond essence into the buttercream.

Chocolate Beat in 30 g (1 oz) sifted cocoa powder.

Chocolate frosting

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate, chopped

185 g (6 oz) caster (superfine) sugar

1 egg white

pinch of cream of tartar

1 Chop the chocolate and put it in a heatproof bowl over a pan of barely simmering water (don't let the bowl touch the water) and stir occasionally until the chocolate has melted.

2 Put the sugar, egg white and cream of tartar in a large heat-proof bowl and place over another pan of barely simmering water. Using electric beaters, beat thoroughly for 6–8 minutes, or until soft peaks form, then remove the bowl from the heat. Whisk in the melted chocolate and then spread over the cake immediately with a palette knife.

Makes enough to cover a 20 cm (8 inch) round cake

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Glacé icing

Chocolate ganache

Glacé icing

185 g (6 oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

1 teaspoon unsalted butter, softened

4–8 teaspoons milk or water

food colouring

1 Sift the icing sugar into a bowl and stir in the butter and enough milk or water to make a thick paste. Colour the icing at this stage if necessary. Warm slightly by standing the bowl in a pan of hot water, until thick and pourable. Use immediately to prevent a crust forming and pour over the cake while warm.

Makes enough to cover a 22 cm (9 inch) round cake

Variations

Citrus icing Use lemon or orange juice in place of the milk.

Chocolate icing Stir 4 teaspoons sifted cocoa powder into the icing.

Strawberry icing Stir in a little pink food colouring and a little strawberry essence.

Passionfruit icing Use passion-fruit pulp in place of the milk.

Chocolate ganache

155 g (5 oz) dark chocolate, chopped

155 ml (5 fl oz) cream

1 Put the chocolate and cream in a heatproof bowl over a pan of barely simmering water (don't let the base of the bowl sit in the water). Stir gently with a wooden spoon until smooth.

2 Remove from the heat and leave until thickened enough to coat the back of the spoon very thickly. The ganache is now ready to pour over a cake. Alternatively, leave until cool, then beat lightly until thick enough to spread or pipe.

Makes enough to cover a 22 cm (9 inch) round cake

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Covering cakes with marzipan

Marzipan is used under icing to give a good flavour. You will need about 1 kg (2 lb) marzipan for a 22 cm (9 inch) cake. Keep marzipan covered with plastic wrap until you are ready to use it, to prevent it from drying out, then briefly knead it until smooth and pliable on a work surface lightly dusted with icing (confectioners') sugar. Trim the dome from the top of the cake with a large sharp knife to make a flat surface. Don't use a serrated knife on a fruit cake—the fruit may drag and tear the cake. Turn the cake over so that the smooth base now becomes the top. Use small pieces of marzipan to plug any holes in the cake.

Sugarpaste-covered cakes

This method creates a cake with soft rounded edges, suitable for then covering with sugarpaste. Put the cake on a board or sheet of non-stick baking paper. Heat a couple of tablespoons of apricot jam with 1 tablespoon water until it boils, then sieve to remove any lumps. This is called an 'apricot glaze' and is used as a glue to hold the icing in place. Brush the cake lightly all over with apricot glaze, using a pastry brush. This method is suitable for both round cakes and those with corners. Roll out the marzipan to about 5 mm (¼ inch) thick and about 7.5 cm (3 inches) wider than the diameter or width of the cake. Don't make it too big or you'll find it difficult to remove the folds in the marzipan. To give more control and prevent tearing the marzipan as you lift it, roll it over the rolling pin, then carefully move it across onto the cake, unrolling and smoothing it over the base and side. Dust your hands with icing (confectioners') sugar and smooth firmly over the cake to remove any folds or wrinkles. Trim off the excess icing with a sharp knife. Pierce any air bubbles with a large glass-head or pearl pin. Smooth the icing with the palm of your hands or an icing smoother.

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keeping your hands dusted with icing (confectioners') sugar to prevent sticking. Leave the marzipan to dry for at least 24 hours before covering with sugarpaste.

Royal-icing covered cakes

This method creates a cake with strong sharp edges suitable for then coating with royal icing. Roll out the marzipan 5 mm (1/4 inch) thick and slightly larger than the top of the cake. Brush the top of the cake lightly with apricot glaze. Invert the cake onto the marzipan and trim to the same size as the cake. Invert the cake again onto a sheet of non-stick baking paper.

Round cakes Brush the side of the cake with apricot glaze. Roll out the marzipan into a long strip. Trim this neatly so it is as long as the circumference of the cake but slightly larger in height. Dust lightly with icing (confectioners') sugar and gently roll up, then unroll it around the side of the cake. Trim and seal the marzipan by cutting in towards the centre with a sharp knife. Dust your hands lightly with icing (confectioners') sugar and smooth the marzipan all over, or use an icing smoother. Dry for at least 24 hours before covering with royal icing.

Cakes with corners Roll out the marzipan to 5 mm (1/4 inch) thick and cut into rectangles slightly larger than the sides of the cake. Brush one of the sides of the cake lightly with apricot glaze. Position a matching piece of marzipan on the side of the cake and press it against the side of the cake. Trim and seal it by cutting the edge in towards the centre. Trim at the corners to fit. Repeat on the remaining sides. Dust your hands lightly with icing (confectioners') sugar and smooth the marzipan all over, or use an icing smoother. Leave to dry for at least 24 hours before covering with royal icing.

Left to right: Trimming the dome from the top of the cake to make it flat; Plugging any holes with pieces of marzipan; Placing the rolled-out marzipan over a cake that is going to be covered with sugarpaste; Cutting marzipan to cover a round cake that is going to be royal-iced; Covering a square cake with marzipan, giving sharp edges to be royal-iced.

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Covering
cakes with sugarpaste

Covering a cake with sugarpaste gives soft edges, in keeping with modern delicate designs (royal icing sets much harder and gives firm sharp edges). Sugarpaste is also known as soft icing and rolled fondant and is available in packets from the supermarket, or you can make your own using the recipe on page 21. You will need about 1 kg (2 lb) ready-made sugarpaste for a 20 cm (8 inch) cake. Keep the sugarpaste covered with plastic wrap until you are ready to use it, to prevent it from drying out. Unused packet sugarpaste can be wrapped in plastic and stored in the fridge for several weeks.

Preparing the cake

Cover the cake with marzipan as described on page 26 and dry completely. (If you don't like marzipan you can cover the cake with two layers of sugarpaste, following the same method.) Brush the marzipan lightly with clear alcohol such as gin, vodka or kirsch, or, for children, use a sugar syrup (equal quantities of sugar and water, stirred over low heat until dissolved, then left to cool). Don't use too much liquid, just enough to make the marzipan 'tacky'. Brush the cake thoroughly: if there are any unbrushed areas the icing won't stick and may cause air bubbles.

Rolling out the sugarpaste

This method is suitable for covering round cakes and cakes with corners. Put the cake on a piece of non-stick baking paper, securing it with royal icing. Knead the sugarpaste until pliable on a work surface lightly dusted with icing (confectioners') sugar. If you want to colour the sugarpaste, do it at this stage (see page 38). Roll out the sugarpaste to 5 mm (1/4 inch) thick and 7.5 cm (3 inches) wider than the diameter of the cake. Move the sugarpaste often to prevent sticking—if you need to add more icing (confectioners') sugar, rub it into the surface.

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Covering the cake

To give more control and prevent tearing the sugarpaste as you lift it, roll it over the rolling pin, then carefully lift it and move it across onto the cake, unrolling and smoothing it over the base and side. Dust your hands with icing (confectioners') sugar and smooth firmly down and over the cake to remove any folds or wrinkles in the sugarpaste. Once the icing is smooth, trim off the excess sugarpaste with a sharp knife. (Wrap the trimmings and any leftover icing in plastic wrap and store in a cool dry place for making models and other decorations.)

Pierce any air bubbles in the sugarpaste with a large glass-head or pearl pin (if the pin hole is visible when the sugarpaste is dry, use a little royal icing in the same colour to plug the hole, then wipe away the excess). Smooth over the sugarpaste with the palm of your hands or an icing smoother, keeping your hands lightly dusted with icing (confectioners') sugar to prevent them sticking. If a fold or crease occurs in the icing, carefully lift it out from the side of the cake and then gently ease it in again, smoothing as you go. Leave the sugarpaste to dry for at least 24 hours before continuing.

Moving the covered cake to a cake board

Once the sugarpaste is completely dry, use the baking paper as a sling to lift the cake onto a board. Secure the paper under the cake to the board with a few dabs of royal icing and then trim away the paper from around the cake with a scalpel so that it can't be seen. (This makes it easy to transfer the cake to the board without putting fingerprints in the icing and also protects the cake from contact with the board—some foil-covered boards can react badly with fruit cakes or the colour from the board can stain the icing.)

Left to right: The cake is covered with marzipan and brushed with clear alcohol or sugar syrup so the sugarpaste will stick; Roll out the sugarpaste until slightly larger than the cake, then use the rolling pin to lower it over the cake; Using a special smoother will give a neat finish; Trim away the excess sugarpaste and secure the cake to the board.

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Covering
cakes with royal icing

Royal icing sets hard and is normally used only on fruit cakes as it needs a strong base for support. If you are making a layered cake, remember dowels and pillars will crack the icing: you need to use stands. Royal-icing a cake is more time-consuming than covering with sugarpaste: three or four layers are spread over the cake and each coat is left to dry for 8 hours. You will need about 1.25 kg (2½ lb) royal icing to cover a 22 cm (9 inch) cake with three coats. Cover the icing with a damp cloth while you are working to prevent a crust forming. Store in an airtight container with plastic wrap on the surface. It is not necessary to keep the icing refrigerated. Re-beat the icing to its original consistency (preferably in a mixer) at least every two days. A turntable is useful for covering the cake. If you don't have one, use an upturned round cake tin.

The consistency of the royal icing for the first and second coats should be 'soft peak' (peaks of icing should stand up and droop over at the tips). Stir in a few drops of water or egg white to soften the icing if necessary. Stir gently before use to blend it and remove air bubbles (the icing changes texture when left to sit). Cover the cake with marzipan, giving sharp edges as shown on page 27, and let the marzipan dry completely.

Icing round cakes

Top of the cake Put the turntable on a damp cloth and place the cake on the turntable. Place a large spoonful of icing in the centre of the cake and, with a palette knife, using a motion like spreading butter on bread, smooth the icing over the cake, keeping the knife quite flat to eliminate air bubbles. Continue until the top of the cake is completely covered. To smooth the surface, hold the tip of the palette knife in the centre of the cake at a slight angle, while turning the turntable. Wipe an icing ruler with a damp cloth and place on the far edge of the cake, holding it at either end, thumbs uppermost.

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Angle the ruler slightly to the surface of the cake and drag it towards you, then pull it off. Wipe clean and repeat if necessary. Remove the excess icing from the top edge of the cake by holding a palette knife parallel with the side and pushing down with a cutting motion. Leave to dry before coating the side of the cake.

Side of the cake Using the same 'buttering' action, apply royal icing with a palette knife held parallel to the side of the cake, then wipe a side scraper with a damp cloth. Hold the side scraper by spreading your fingers over the back of it and use the pad of your little finger to lift the scraper away from the cake board slightly. Place the scraper at a slight angle to the side of the cake and, touching the icing, turn the cake on the turntable, keeping the scraper in the same spot. Use the palette knife to remove excess icing from the top edge of the cake: keep the knife flat and cut inwards as you move around the top. Leave the icing to dry for 8 hours, then remove the rough edges with a sharp knife. Dust off the sugar dust with a large soft brush. Repeat to apply a second coat and leave to dry. For the third coat, thin the icing down a little. If you are still not happy with the smooth finish, apply a fourth coat, also of thinned icing.

Square cakes

For a square cake, apply the icing to the top as for the round cake, then 'butter' the icing onto one of the sides of the cake, holding the palette knife vertically and positioning your finger down the back of the blade to apply pressure to the icing and disperse air bubbles. Move the scraper along the side and, at the end of the side, pull it off towards yourself. Start the second side by bringing the 'take off' mark made by the scraper on the first side around to the second side. Repeat until you have coated all four sides. Always ensure that all the edges are neat before drying and applying the next coat.

Left to right: Spreading royal icing over the top of a cake with a palette knife; Spread the first coat of royal icing around the side of the cake by turning the turntable; Wait until the first coat of icing is dry before applying the second coat in the same way; Apply three or four coats if necessary to give a beautiful smooth finish.

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Covering cake boards

Cake boards are used to support and transport cakes. You can buy boards or cut them to size from heavy-duty cardboard (for light cakes) or thin sheets of chipboard. Cakes with several tiers need a thick board under the bottom layer. Cover boards with coloured paper, fabric, or sugarpaste or royal icing. Some papers, being porous, will absorb oils from the cake and stain. If you're worried about this, cover the paper with clear plastic or place a layer of non-stick baking paper between the cake and board.

Covering with paper or fabric

To cover a round board, place the board on an upside-down sheet of paper. Draw around it, then draw an outline 5 cm (2 inches) outside this line and cut out the larger outline. Make diagonal cuts 1 cm (1/2 inch) apart around the edge, cutting in as far as the smaller outline. Brush the board with glue and put onto the paper, pressing out any air bubbles. Fold the cut edges over and secure with glue. Cut another round of paper slightly smaller than the board and stick over the top to hide the cut edge. On some tiered cakes the underneath of the board will be visible, so cover it neatly.

To cover a board with corners with paper or fabric, place the board on an upside-down sheet of paper. Draw around the board, then draw an outline 5 cm (2 inches) larger than the board and cut this out. Brush the board with glue and put onto the paper, pressing out any air bubbles. Fold in the sides and secure with tape or glue, folding the corners in neatly as you go. Cut another piece of paper slightly smaller than the board and glue over the top to hide the folded edge.

To cover unusual-shaped boards, use the same methods, taking care with corners as they can tear easily (especially if you're using glue, which will soften the paper).

Covering with sugarpaste

Strip method Place the cake on the board. Cut a strip of sugarpaste to fit around the board. Brush the board with water, position the strip with the cut edge against the cake, then trim the

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outer edge. If it is a large cake, use two strips. Overlap any joins, cut through the two thicknesses and remove the excess. Pinch the two edges of sugarpaste together and smooth over the surface. For a square cake, cut four lengths the same measurement as the board, overlap at the corners and cut through from the corner point of the board to the corner of the cake, then smooth the join.

'All-in-one' method This gives a good clean line. Place the cake on the board. Brush the cake and board lightly with clear alcohol or sugar syrup. Roll out the icing large enough to cover the cake and board. Lift the sugarpaste, positioning it on the edge of the board and then onto the cake. Smooth over the top and sides, gently pressing the sugarpaste into the side of the cake, the edge where the cake meets the board and then over the board. Smooth over and trim off the excess icing, using a cutting motion away from the edge of the board.

Template method Cover the cake with sugarpaste and leave to dry for 24 hours. Cut a template the size of the cake. Brush the edge of the board with clear alcohol, roll out the sugarpaste to cover the whole board, cover the board and trim the edge. Put the template on the board where the cake will sit and cut around the edge. Remove the template and lift out the sugarpaste. Put a dab of royal icing in the hole and then place the cake into the hole. Smooth the sugarpaste on the board into the join.

Covering with royal icing

Small boards can be coated completely, large boards can be coated with an 8 cm (3 inch) band round the edge. Spread the board with slightly thinned-down icing, with the same 'buttering' motion used to coat the cake. A turntable will help with a neat finish. Clean the edge of the board with the palette knife using a downward cutting motion. Wipe the knife regularly with a damp cloth. When finished, wipe the edge of the board with a damp cloth and leave to dry. Coat the cake on a temporary board, placing a thin cake card, the same size and shape as the cake, underneath. Keep this under the cake when it is put on the real board, to prevent staining.

Left to right: Covering a round board with paper; Covering a square board with fabric; Covering a board with sugarpaste using the 'all-in-one' and template methods; Covering a board with royal icing.

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Tiers and layers

Light cakes that have two or three layers can be placed directly on top of each other. But cakes that are made up of many layers, especially heavy fruit cakes, need to be supported by pillars. As a general rule most tiered cakes are wedding cakes, but you can make other cakes in tiers too. Make sure the cakes are well balanced and visually appealing, either centred above each other or obviously off-centre. You don't have to have the cakes the same height apart—the top layer could be raised up high. The following method, using dowels and pillars, is suitable for cakes covered with sugarpaste. You cannot insert dowels into royal icing and need to support the layers with ring stands.

Cake boards

Each of the cakes needs to be on a cake board. You can make the cake boards invisible by making them slightly smaller than the cakes. If you want the boards to be visible, cover them in paper or icing. If you are using tall pillars you will be able to see the underside of the cake boards, so make sure they are neatly covered. The bottom tier has to support the weight of all the other layers.

Cake dowels

Thick wooden dowels with a point at one end are used to support the cake. These are hidden from view by covering them with pillars or decorating with ribbon or sugarpaste to match the cake.

Positioning the dowels

Trace the outline of the top cake onto paper. Place the paper over the lower cake and prick through it where you will put the pillars. Make the pricks 3 cm (1 1/4 inches) in from the outer edge of the top cake. Use four pillars for a square cake and three or four for a round cake (work out the spacing by folding the paper into quarters, then open it out over the cake). For odd-shaped cakes, or cakes with the top tier off-centre, it doesn't matter how many supports you use, as long as you space them evenly to hold the weight. Continue down the layers until you have made a template of each cake and marked the pillar positions onto the cake beneath it.

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Putting in the dowels

Push the dowels into the pin prick marks on the cake, pointed ends first, as far as they will go (they will probably go down until they touch the board unless you are using a particularly dense fruit cake). Remove the dowels and reposition point-up so they are sitting on their flat ends and are more stable. If the cake is to sit directly on top of the cake below, without being raised above it, mark the dowel level with the icing, then take it out and cut it off at the mark. Re-insert the dowel into the same hole. Repeat with the other dowels so that they all sit level with the icing on the cake. Sit the smaller cake on top so it completely covers the dowels.

For cakes with tiers that are to be separated, there are two different types of pillars that you can use: hollow and solid. If you are using solid pillars, insert the dowels as above, cutting them off level with the icing, and sit the pillars on top, securing with royal icing. If you are using hollow pillars, insert the dowels as above but, before marking, put one of the pillars over the dowel. Mark the dowel level with the top of the pillar, remove the pillar and dowel and cut the dowel off at the mark. Re-insert the dowel into the same hole. If you're using clear perspex pillars, you can paint the top of the dowel with non-toxic paint to match the icing so it can't be seen through the pillar.

Other ideas

A wide variety of stands and pillars are available, such as tilting cake stands and perspex or glass tubes. If you glue ribbon or paper onto the dowels, remember to allow for the height of the cake and icing and leave this portion undecorated. Light cakes can be layered with upturned glasses.

Transporting

Separate the cake into layers, leaving the pillars and dowels in place. Cut a piece of thin foam the size of each layer. Put this in the base of a box about the same size as the cake to minimize movement. Use a folded strip of baking paper as a 'sling' to lift each cake layer into its own box.

Left to right: Trace the outline of the cake onto paper to make a template for the dowels; Make pin pricks through the paper; Pushing in and cutting off the dowels; Covering dowels with hollow pillars.

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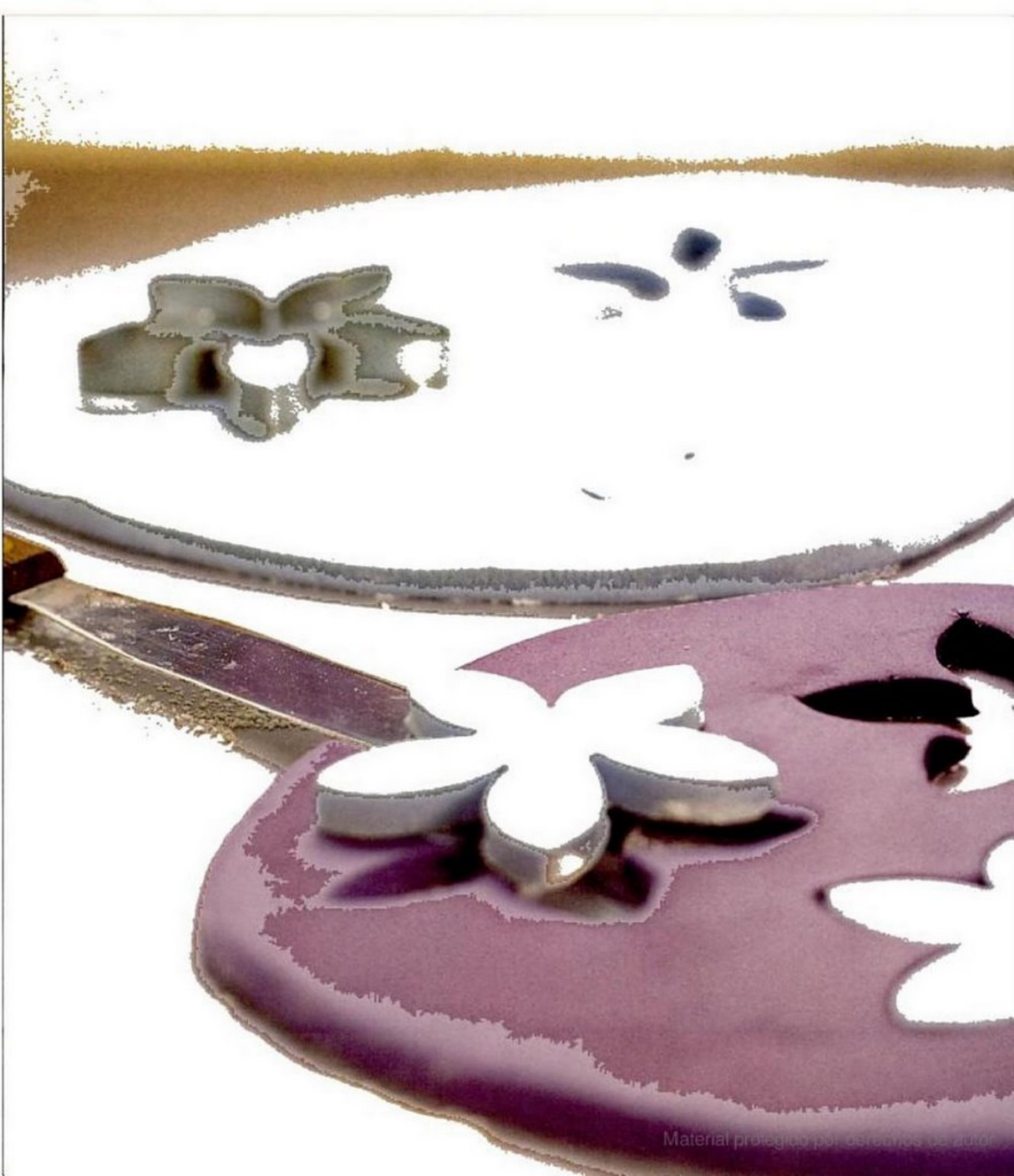

Working with sugarpaste

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Adding colour

Colour scheme

Choose a base colour for the icing: for wedding cakes this is often white and for children a primary colour, and there is a whole colour spectrum in between. A monochromatic colour scheme uses shades of only one colour: so if the base colour is pale yellow the decorations will be darker tones of yellow. A complementary scheme uses colours that are opposite each other on the colour spectrum, such as yellow and violet, red and green. Use the colours in different shades and small touches so that they do not look garish. A harmonious colour scheme uses several colours that are next to each other on the colour spectrum, such as pinks and purples.

Colouring sugarpaste

Both sugarpaste and royal icing can be coloured any shade of the colour spectrum. You can buy ready-coloured sugarpaste, colour your own while it is soft or paint it once the icing is dry. The easiest way to change the overall colour of sugarpaste (or marzipan) is by adding paste or liquid food colouring (paste is usually better quality, will give a stronger colour and is more manageable). When using liquid colourings, never pour them directly from the bottle: use a dropper or pour a little into a small container and use sparingly. Knead the sugarpaste lightly on a surface dusted with icing (confectioners') sugar, then dip the end of a cocktail stick into the food colouring and wipe it onto the sugarpaste (a little colour can go a long way, so add a tiny dab at a time, especially if you want soft colours). Knead gently again until the colour is evenly distributed. Check by cutting the sugarpaste in half. Once you've reached the right colour, wrap the sugarpaste in plastic until you're ready to use it. Royal icing can be coloured by using liquid food colourings.

Marbling

Marbling is achieved by partially blending two colours of sugarpaste to create streaks. Do this either by rolling coloured strips of sugarpaste together, working with your fingers until marbled, or knead the white sugarpaste until

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pliable and add random drops of paste or liquid colouring. Fold and twist the sugarpaste until the colour starts to streak. The more you knead the icing, the less obvious the marbling will be.

Sponging

Sponging can give your cake a mottled effect. Use a sponge and some food colouring diluted with a little clear alcohol. Dip a small piece of sponge in the colour: don't saturate it, it needs to be just damp. Practise on a spare piece of icing first, then work directly on the cake. If you like, mask off any areas of the cake that you don't want to colour by using a paper template. Sponge the cake, then lift off the template and let the colouring dry. This can give you a quick stencilled look, using a bought or home-made stencil. You can use more than one colour. To avoid smudging, wait until one colour is completely dry before applying the next. To create a mottled textured effect, use the same method to sponge with diluted royal icing.

Hand-painting

Painting is good for adding details to figures, or free-painting scenes onto plain iced cakes or plaques to be attached to cakes. Use paste or powder colourings, mixed with clear alcohol. Before applying any colour, ensure the icing is completely dry and firm to the touch. Use a very fine brush and don't overload the brush or the icing will be too wet and make the colour streaky. Dip a brush lightly in the colour then dab off any excess on a sheet of paper towel.

Food colouring pens are excellent for marking features and fine details on modelling figures. To transfer a picture freehand onto a cake, lightly draw it with a sharp instrument. Alternatively, 'trace' the design onto the surface of the cake, by tracing from the original onto tracing paper, then placing the paper over the cake. Go over the design with a scriber or prick lightly with a pin so that it is transferred to the cake.

Left to right: Use the spectrum to create a colour scheme; Add colour sparingly with a cocktail stick; Sugarpaste can be coloured by marbling, sponging or painting with a fine brush and liquid colour.

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Decorative designs

These designs are easy methods to tidy up areas on your cake that can look 'unfinished', such as the edge where the cake and board meet or a plaque is attached, or to hide the top of extension work. Embossing requires no special tools—use patterned buttons, jewellery or decorative spoon handles. Garrett frills are flared frills that are attached to the top, side or corners of cakes or used in modelling. Broderie anglaise gives a lace finish. All of these designs are carried out on soft sugarpaste (if you find your paste is too soft, knead in a little flower paste to firm it up).

Edging

Rope Twist thin rolls of sugarpaste together and secure to the side of the cake with water or edible glue. Use one or two colours of sugarpaste, and different sizes.

Plait Plait three thin rolls of sugarpaste and secure to the side of the cake with water or edible glue. Use one, two or three different colours.

Crimping Crimp a thin roll of sugarpaste around the base of a cake or use a pair of crimpers (overweight tweezers) to crimp the top edge of a cake or board.

Embossing

Press the embossing tool (you can use a clean button or piece of jewellery) gently but evenly into soft sugarpaste or marzipan.

To cover a large area, simply repeat the embossing, spacing the pattern evenly. The indentations should be the same depth.

Paint the design with paste, liquid or powder colouring, mixed with water or clear alcohol. Add lettering with royal icing.

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Garrett frills

Mark a line on the cake where the frill will be attached. Roll out sugarpaste on a board lightly dusted with cornflour (cornstarch).

Cut out a frill with a garrett frill cutter. Alternatively use a fluted cutter and cut out the centre with a plain cutter.

With the paste close to the edge of the board, frill with a cocktail stick. Hold the stick with one hand and press lightly with the forefinger of the other, turning the frill as you go.

Cut through the frill to make one long strip and turn it over. Brush a little water or egg white along the flat edge. Lift with both hands and press gently onto the marked line.

Tuck the cut ends under slightly to neaten and ease out the frill with the cocktail stick. Dust the frilled edge with colour. For layered frills, apply the bottom layer first.

You could pipe a small snail trail or fine design along the top edge, or attach small icing flowers with royal icing or roll a quilting wheel on the soft edge for a stitched look.

Broderie anglaise

Trace the pattern onto non-stick baking paper. Position over the sugarpaste and mark the main points of the pattern with a pin.

Cut out the holes with a number 2 or 3 piping tube. (If working directly on the cake, enlarge the holes with a modelling tool.)

Pipe around the holes with royal icing, using a number 0 or 1 piping tube. Neaten the edges of the royal icing with a damp paintbrush.

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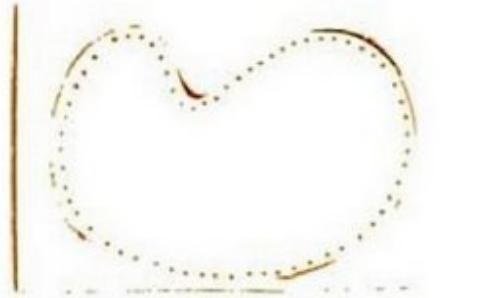
Inlay, bas-relief and appliqué

These easy techniques involve cutting out shapes and applying them to the cake or a plaque, either by removing a section of the icing and replacing it (inlay) or by laying the pieces on top of the existing icing (appliqué and bas-relief). Sugarpaste is mainly used, but try modelling paste for fine work. When using inlay directly on a covered cake, do not brush the marzipan with clear alcohol before applying the sugarpaste as you need to be able to remove sections easily.

Inlay

Trace a template onto non-stick baking paper and place over the icing (this technique is usually done on the top of the cake, but you can also make plaques). Secure with pins inside the line of the shape.

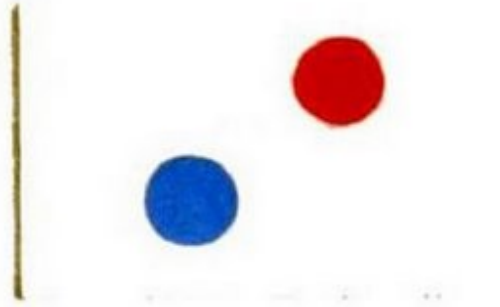
Mark through the paper all the way around the shape with a pin. Cut out the shape with a scalpel on the outside of the pin marks for a neat finish and lift out.



Roll out coloured sugarpaste to the same thickness as the piece of sugarpaste just removed. Cut out the same shape (using the template and the same method).

Put the coloured icing into the space left by the removed piece of icing. Smooth over with your fingertips to ease the edges together neatly.

Make more templates to cut out and inlay the other parts of the design.



Smooth over with an icing smoother once all the pieces are inlaid.

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Bas-relief

Trace a template onto thin card. Roll out the sugarpaste 3 mm (1/8 inch) thick and cut out using the template and a scalpel. Moisten the back with a little water and attach to the cake.

Use small pieces of sugarpaste and roll out or mould with your fingers to build up areas of the design. Attach with a little water. (Don't build the pieces up too high.)

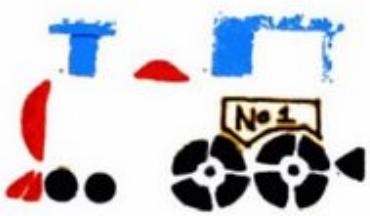
Cut out a shape the same as the base, moisten the back and place over the built-up icing, smoothing down. Make finishing touches with royal icing or colourings.

Appliqué

Trace a template onto thin card. Cut out separate templates for each layer or colour. Roll out each colour of sugarpaste to 3 mm (1/8 inch) thick. Cut out the shapes with the template and wrap in plastic.

Moisten the back of each shape with a little water and attach to the cake or icing plaque in order.

Pipe decorations, names etc onto the appliqué to finish. Use letter cutters to create names on a plaque or cake. Attach with a little water.



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Needlework designs

These decorative features, taken from needlework, are worked onto soft paste. Quilting gives the impression of a padded image with stitch marks joining the pieces. Smocking is a form of embroidery, with the soft icing gathered into tiny pleats. Ribbons of fabric or icing can be 'woven' into sugarpaste using the ribbon insertion technique. The iced cake should be left until the sugarpaste has firmed a little on the surface.

Quilting

Choose a cutter or trace your design onto paper. Transfer the design to the cake by pressing the cutter firmly into the icing or pin-pricking through the paper.

Use a small quilting wheel to make any marks on the background, such as grass, strings for balloons etc. You can then dust around this area with colour.

Use white firm-peak royal icing to pipe the padding into your design. Pad in the central areas to give three dimensions to the design. Leave to dry.

Cut out pieces from coloured sugarpaste. Smooth and moisten the edges and place over the padded areas. Mark the design with the wheel.

Cut out small pieces of different coloured sugarpaste to add the detail. Indent holes for noses and eyes and fill with dark sugarpaste.

Use the quilting wheel to stitch over the design, defining the outline of heads and bodies.

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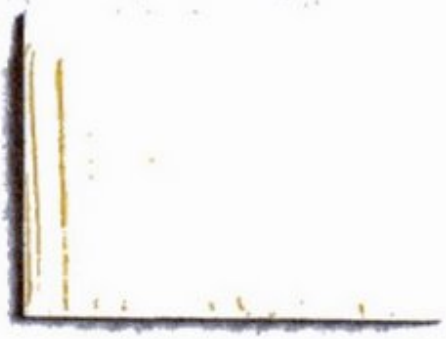

Smocking

Cut a cardboard template the shape of the piece of smocking. Roll out the sugarpaste to 3 mm (1/8 inch) thick, then roll with a ribbed rolling pin to 1.75 mm (1/16 inch) thick.

Place the template on the sugarpaste and cut out with a knife (cut an even number of ribs). Moisten the back of the sugarpaste with water and attach to the cake.

Using ordinary or smocking tweezers, gently squeeze together pairs of ridges to make the smocking (because you have an even number of ribs, there won't be any left over).

If you are applying several panels next to each other, ensure the crimping pattern continues from one panel to the next.

Using a piping bag with a small plain tube, pipe a line or dot (to represent a stitch) of coloured royal icing over the top of the icing where the pleats are pinched together.

Pipe threads from the pinched pleat on the upper row to the pinched pleat on the next row, to represent the loose embroidery thread. Finish with a line of piping or a frill.

Ribbon insertion

Make evenly spaced marks along the edge of a piece of paper. Hold the paper on the sugarpaste and cut slits with a scalpel.

Cut the ribbon into lengths a little longer than the gaps. Hold one end with tweezers. Insert the other end into the slit with a scalpel.

Use white firm-peak royal icing to pipe the padding into your design. Pad in the central areas to give three dimensions to the design.

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Working with royal icing

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Piping with royal icing

Royal icing is spread over the cake or piped into delicate patterns with a bag and tube. It can be piped directly onto cakes covered with sugarpaste or royal icing; piped onto sugarpaste plaques; or piped onto non-stick baking paper or acetate, dried under a heat lamp and attached to the cake with royal icing.

Icing consistencies

Once the icing is made, it is beaten until it reaches a thicker consistency. The two main terms used for the consistency of royal icing are soft peak and firm peak.

Soft peak means that when you lift a spoonful of icing from the bowl, the icing below should retain its shape with a peak, which just bends over at the top.

Firm peak means that when a spoonful of icing is lifted from the bowl, the icing should easily retain a peak without bending over.

It is important not to have air bubbles in your royal icing: stir before use or pipe through one bag and into another. Store icing in an airtight container for up to two days with plastic wrap on the surface to eliminate any air. To store short term, cover the bowl with plastic or a damp cloth, or, if the icing is already in a bag, wrap the bag in plastic and then a damp cloth to prevent it drying out. Cover the ends of tubes to prevent icing drying on the tips.

Colouring royal icing

Like sugarpaste, royal icing can be coloured before use or painted when it is dry. If using paste colours, add a little at a time with a cocktail stick. If using liquid food colours, colour the icing before watering down, so it is not runny. Food colourings containing glycerine may inhibit drying.

Piping bags

You can buy piping bags made of plastic, nylon or jaconette or use piping syringes. For better control, make your own bags. Cut a 25 cm (10 inch) square of non-stick baking paper in half diagonally to make two triangles. Holding one triangle with its longest side away

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from you, fold the right-hand point over to meet the bottom point, curling the paper to make a cone. Fold the left-hand point over the cone and bring all three points together. Fold the points over twice to secure. Cut off 1 cm (1/2 inch) of the tip and fit a piping tube inside the bag. Make all the bags needed before you start: if you are using different tubes and colours of icing, you will need a different bag for each.

Tubes, tips and nozzles

These range from fine writing tubes to large tubes for stars, basketwork, leaves and petals. Shapes vary from plain round to stars. The sizes are universal measures with number 0000 being the finest and 4 the largest. Generally, the smaller the tube, the thinner the icing should be. Also, the smaller the tube you are using, the finer the work and the smaller the bag should be, to give you maximum control. Tips is the American term and nozzles an alternative name.

To start piping

Fill the piping bag only two-thirds full—if you put too much in, icing may seep from the top—and then fold over the top of the bag. It is best to hold the icing bag with two hands, however experienced you are. Use the index finger of one hand to support the bag underneath, with the thumb keeping the bag closed at the top and applying pressure. Rest the index finger of the other hand against the base of the bag to guide the tube and prevent your hand shaking through the application of pressure.

To pipe a line, touch the tube against the surface where you are piping and squeeze. Once the icing starts to flow and attaches itself to the surface, start to slowly pull away. If you don't pull away immediately, a bulb will form at the start of your icing. If you squeeze too hard, your line will be curly, if you squeeze too softly, the line will fade and break.

Left to right: Royal icing at soft-peak and firm-peak stages; Cover with plastic wrap to prevent drying out; Colouring with paste; Making a piping bag; Tubes come in many sizes to pipe varying widths of line.

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Basic piping

Linework is the basic piping technique, with the most popular linework being the edging or outlining of shell, bulb and scroll borders. Overpiping on top of an existing line will make the outline more prominent. Half-fill the bag with soft-peak royal icing and hold the bag with your index finger underneath to support it and your thumb on top, keeping the bag closed and applying pressure. Use the index finger of your other hand to steady the tube. Touch the tip of the tube on the surface and, as soon as you feel the icing attached, slowly pull away.

Zigzag

Holding the bag at a 60° angle, using constant pressure and with the tube touching the surface, pipe a zigzag line. Work from side to side, making the zigzag wider in the centre.

Bulb

Hold the bag at a 90° angle, with the tube just above the surface. Squeeze with even pressure to form a circle of icing. Release the pressure and take off gently. If small peaks occur, touch down with a damp paintbrush.

C shape

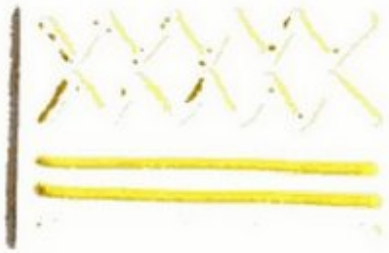
Holding the bag at a 90° angle, pipe a curved 'C' shape, using constant even pressure. Release the pressure and remove the tube with a backward motion to help prevent a peak forming.

Snail trail

Hold the bag at a 60° angle, just touching the tube on the surface. Make a bulb of icing, then ease off the pressure sideways to make a tail. Pipe the next teardrop over the tail of the previous one.

Teardrop

Hold the bag at a 60° angle, just touching the tube on the surface. Make a bulb of icing, then ease off the pressure sideways to make a tail.



Line

Hold the bag at a 60° angle, just touching the tube on the surface, squeeze with even pressure and slowly pull away. For zigzags, pipe short lines, releasing the pressure and lifting off at the end of each line.

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Twisted rope

Hold the bag at a 45° angle. Using constant pressure, gradually rotate the bag across the icing surface to create a coil effect.

Basketweave

Using a basketweave tube, hold the bag at a 45° angle. Apply even pressure to the bag and pipe horizontal lines, spaced a little apart. Pipe vertical lines alternately over the rows, following the pattern shown.

Star

Use small or large star tubes. Hold the bag upright, squeeze out the icing and then pull up into a point. These can be piped in a border or used to cover a large area on the top or side of the cake.

C scroll

Hold the bag at a 90° angle and pipe a bulb. Applying gentle pressure, twist your wrist to make a 'C'. To create texture, agitate the tube up and down while releasing the pressure on the bag.

Alternating shells

Make a bulb, then sweep the tube down to the surface to make a tail, angling it slightly. Pipe another shell, slightly lower than the first and just touching, bringing the tail up to the same line. Continue to the right.

Rosette

Tubes for rosettes have finer indentations than star tubes. Hold the bag almost upright and squeeze, moving the bag in a circular motion and lifting slightly. To finish, bring the tube to the centre and pull off.

Shell border

Hold the bag at a 45° angle and squeeze to make a bulb. Reducing the pressure, sweep the tube down towards the surface to form the tail. Make the next shell over the tail of the previous to form a border.

Fleur-de-lys

Pipe a central elongated shell, then pipe a curved shell on the left, bringing the tail to the same point as the first shell. Pipe a curved shell from the right, bringing the tail to the same point.

S scroll

Hold the bag at a 90° angle and pipe a bulb. Apply more pressure while agitating the bag up and down to make the beginnning of the scroll. Releasing the pressure, turn your wrist anti-clockwise, then clockwise.

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Pressure piping

Pressure piping means increasing and decreasing the pressure on the bag to produce shapes that are more three-dimensional than the basic shapes. The icing must be soft enough to pipe into shapes but not so runny that it won't hold the shape. Gradually water down soft-peak royal icing until it will hold its shape but goes smooth when a knife is agitated on the surface. Pipe directly onto an iced cake, or pipe onto non-stick baking paper and dry under a lamp. Remove the piece from the paper with a palette knife when dry and attach to the cake with royal icing.

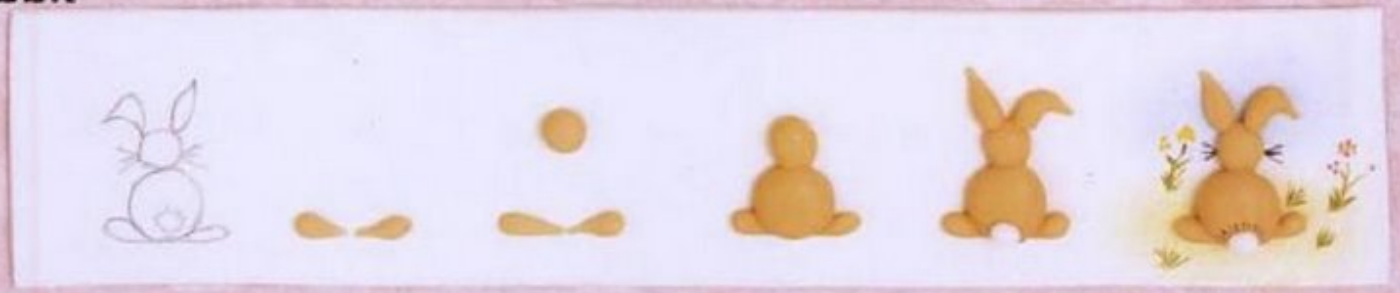
Rose

Attach a cone of marzipan to a cocktail stick. Use firm-peak royal icing and a large petal tube. Hold the bag so the thin end of the tube is facing upwards at a 45° angle and the curved side faces the cone.

Pipe icing onto the tip of the cone. For the centre, pipe while rotating the stick, release the pressure and pull away. For petals, turn the tube so the curve faces away from the cone with the thin edge uppermost.

Pipe just below the rose centre with even pressure, turning the stick and lifting the tube to form a horseshoe shaped petal. Add petals in odd numbers. Dry, then slide off the stick and trim the base to sit flat.

Rabbit



If you need, draw out a template to guide you. Using a number 2 piping tube and pale brown icing, pipe two small elongated bulbs to make feet.

Pipe two circular bulbs for the head and body, one on top of the other with the body larger than the head.

Pipe elongated teardrops for the ears, flopping one over. Pipe a bulb of white for the tail. Paint whiskers and other detail directly onto the cake.

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Reindeer

If you need, draw out a template to guide you. Pipe antlers, using brown royal icing and a number 2 tube. Pipe ears in white royal icing, flopping them over.

Pipe the head in a large teardrop shape, applying more pressure to increase the height at the muzzle. Pipe white elongated teardrops for the eyes, meeting in the centre.

Pipe a red bulb over the base of the eyes for the nose. When dry, paint in black eyes and more features.

Teddy bear

If you need, draw out a template to guide you. Using a number 2 tube and cream icing, pipe ears and a body, creating a smooth surface on the icing by moving the piping tube around in the icing while piping.

Pipe the head in the same way as the body. Pipe a bulb for each leg, then a second layer of overlapping bulbs for the feet. Pipe bulbs for the muzzle and arms, adding small bulbs for the paws.

Pipe on a small dot for the nose. Dust the bear or paint with food colouring and paint in features with a fine paintbrush.

Duck

If you need, draw out a template to guide you. Using white icing and a number 1 tube, pipe two overlapping layers of shells to make a teardrop shape for the wing. Leave to dry.

With a number 1 tube, pipe yellow royal icing to make the beak and feet. With a number 2 tube, pipe an 's' scroll to make the head and neck.

Squeeze very hard on the bag to make the body. Set the wing into the body while the body is still wet. Pipe a blue dot for the duck's eye.

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Runouts

Runouts are made by piping an outline onto non-stick baking paper or acetate and then filling in the outline with thinner icing, like colouring in a picture. The design is left to dry and then gently lifted off the paper and attached to the cake. The technique is used to create a picture or make small intricate pieces to be incorporated into other designs or techniques, such as making doors or shutters for a gingerbread house. The simplest form of runout is the picture plaque, but you can create two-sided or three-dimensional runouts that stand up on the cake. The technique is sometimes known as flooding, because the area within the outline is 'flooded' with icing.

The icing consistency

For runouts, it is important to use freshly beaten royal icing. Fit a piping bag with a number 1 or 0 tube and fill with firm-peak icing for piping the outline. Then begin to 'let down' the icing for flooding, by stirring in water a drop at a time until the icing has the consistency of thick (double/heavy) cream (do not beat in the water or your icing may contain a lot of air bubbles). Gently paddle out air bubbles with a palette knife. If you are going to colour the icing, do this before letting down, so that it does not become too runny, and use a colouring that does not contain glycerine, which would inhibit the drying of the runout. To test the consistency, draw a line across the surface of the icing with a knife; the mark should disappear by the count of 10. Half-fill an icing bag with the icing—you do not need a tube.

Making the outline

Trace your design onto paper and secure this to a flat work surface. Lay a sheet of non-stick baking paper or acetate over the top and secure with masking tape. Make sure both pieces of paper are flat and smooth. Pipe over the outline of the pattern with the firm-peak icing, making sure the joins are neat. Leave to dry until 'crusted' over under a hot lamp before filling in the design. Experienced decorators can colour in the icing directly without piping an outline.

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Filling in the outline

Cut a small hole, the size of a number 1 tube for small sections or a number 2 tube for large sections, in the bag with the runout icing and begin to colour in the design by flooding. Hold the point of the bag close to the outline. Move the bag slowly backwards and forwards, using a little pressure to ease the icing out, as if you were colouring in. Once the first area is flooded, release the pressure on the bag and remove, from the side of the area and over the outline, so that you do not get a mark in the smooth icing.

Place under a heat lamp for a few minutes to allow the sugar to crust over on the top surface (the lamp will ensure the runout doesn't sink by taking too long to dry, and also gives a shiny finish).

Gradually build up the picture using the various colours, leaving the icing of each section to form a crust before starting the next. This will help define the sections. If you are using very dark colours, leave to dry for slightly longer to avoid the colours running (if you find your colours are running, your icing may be too runny).

Use a paintbrush or the tip of the piping bag to help ease the icing into the corners of the design and break any air bubbles that appear. Raised areas, such as arms or clothing, can be created by piping two layers.

Drying

When all the different sections of the runout are complete, place under a heat lamp immediately for 1 hour to ensure the runout dries with a good sheen. Then put the runout in a warm dry room and leave to dry completely. Small pieces will need about 24 hours and larger pieces 48 hours (pieces that are sunken have taken too long to dry). When dry, carefully peel off the masking tape, holding the picture in position, and pull the runout to the edge of the board. Gently peel off the paper.

Finishing touches can be painted or dusted on by hand when dry, either before you remove the runouts from the paper or after.

Left to right: Draw the designs on paper and secure to a flat surface; Pipe the outlines with firm-peak icing; Flood the designs, pushing the icing into corners; Remove the dry runouts with a palette knife.

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Runout collars

Runout collars are made to be attached to the top surface of cakes and extend over the edge, increasing the border and giving the cake an appearance of importance and being larger than it actually is. The design used for the runout collar is sometimes repeated around the base on the board in place of the conventional piped border. Runout collars are delicate, so it is a good idea to make two collars in case of breakages, or make several spare pieces if your collar is in separate parts.

Piping the outline

For a simple collar, measure the top of the cake and draw a template of the collar design on paper, ensuring the collar extends over the edge of the cake. Attach the paper to a flat working surface and secure a piece of non-stick baking paper or acetate over the top with masking tape.

Fit a piping bag with a number 1 or 0 tube and fill with firm-peak royal icing. Pipe over the outline. Score the baking paper with a scalpel, making a cross in the centre and a slit between each corner of the collar and the secured corner of the paper. This will stop the collar warping and changing its shape while drying.

The icing consistency

For flooding the runout collar the consistency of the icing needs to be fairly thin. 'Let down' the icing by stirring in water a drop at a time until the icing has the consistency of cream (do not beat in the water or your icing may contain a lot of air bubbles). Gently paddle out air bubbles with a palette knife. If you are going to colour the icing, do this before letting down, so that it does not become too runny, and use a colouring that does not contain glycerine, which would inhibit the drying of the runout. To test the consistency, draw a line across the surface of the icing with a knife; the mark should disappear by the count of 5. Fill a piping bag with the icing—you do not need a tube on the icing bag. Cut a number 2 size hole in the bag and squeeze the icing into a second large bag to get rid of air bubbles.

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Filling in the outline

Cut a number 2 hole in the piping bag containing the runout icing and start flooding the collar, working around the collar in small sections at a time, ensuring there are no joins visible. Push the icing gently into the corners of the collar with a damp paintbrush. Burst any air bubbles with the paintbrush or a pin.

Put the collar under a heat lamp to crust over the surface and give it a sheen. Remove the lamp and leave the collar in a warm dry place until hard.

Attaching to the cake

Release the collar from the paper or acetate by easing a fine palette knife between the two, gently working around the collar. Attach to the top of the cake by piping soft royal icing along the top edges of the cake and carefully lifting the collar into position. Do not press the collar but allow it to settle on the soft icing. Leave to dry.

Collar designs

Collars do not have to be made as one whole round or square piece; they can be made in smaller sections and attached separately to the top of the cake. This is especially useful for multi-sided cakes such as hexagons or octagons. The joins can be decorated with piping or covered with a small flooded design called an overlay.

Quarter or corner collars are easy for beginners as they can be adjusted to fit the cake. For square cakes you can also make four small corner collars. Side collars are used as an alternative to corner collars. These are made in four or more pieces for square or multi-sided cakes.

The designs for collars can vary from a simple circle or square extending over the edges of a cake, to elaborate curved patterns such as a collar of overlapping leaves, stars or hearts. Designs can be made more delicate by leaving sections of the pattern unflooded. This section can then be left empty or decorated when the rest of the collar is dry.

Left to right: Check that the collar fits the size of the cake; Pipe the outline with firm-peak icing; Flood the collar, pushing the icing into the corners; Secure the dry collar to the top of the cake.

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Embroidery and filigree

Embroidery is another piping technique for giving a cake a 'finished' look. Decoration can be as simple as plain white 'hailspots' or repeating flowers around the cake. There are many types of embroidery, the two most popular being tube and brush embroidery. Tube embroidery can be piped either freehand or with a template, but with brush embroidery it is best to use a template. These techniques can be used on both the cake and board. Filigree is ornamental fine lacework that can be piped directly onto a cake, or piped onto paper like a runout and removed when dry.

Embroidery

Hail spots Pipe soft-peak royal icing with a number 1 tube randomly in tiny dots over the cake. Use white icing or coloured for contrast and group together to create flowers.

Roses Pipe soft-peak royal icing with a number 1 tube, creating curved lines that spread outwards in a circular pattern. Pipe stems and leaves in a contrasting colour.

Daisies Pipe soft-peak royal icing with a number 1 tube to make either pointed or rounded petals. Pipe a bulb in the centre and stems and leaves in a contrasting colour.

Tube embroidery

Trace your design onto paper. Turn the paper over and place in position on the sugarpaste.

Trace over the top of the design with a scriber and lift away the paper. (Alternatively you can prick the design onto the cake through the template with a pin.)

Using a number 1 or 0 tube, pipe over the scribed lines and dots with the icing representing neat parallel stitches. You can use white or coloured icing.

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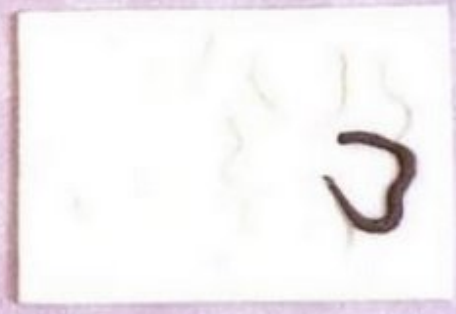


Brush embroidery

Trace your design onto paper. Turn the paper over and place under a sheet of perspex. Hold in position with masking tape. Pipe over the outline on the perspex with a number 1 tube and leave to dry.

Turn the perspex over and press the hard royal icing onto soft sugarpaste. Press firmly and then lift off the perspex. The outline should be indented into the sugarpaste. Alternatively, scribe the outline.

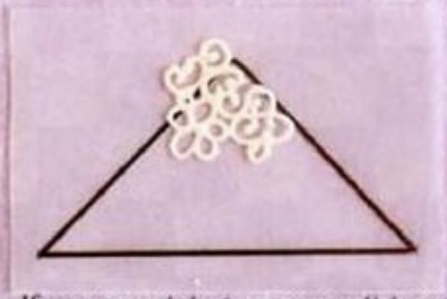
Pipe over a small area of the outline with soft-peak royal icing, using a number 1 or 2 tube. Work with a small area at a time, so the icing doesn't dry.

Using a small damp paintbrush, touch the surface of the royal icing and stroke it downwards towards the centre of the design.

Create texture by using a fine brush or piping fine lines. Dimension can be given by piping and brushing another layer over the first, once dry.

Interesting effects can be created by using white brush embroidery on a cake iced with coloured sugarpaste or marzipan.

Filigree



Pipe directly onto the iced cake or onto non-stick baking paper. Use a number 1 or 0 tube, holding the tube lightly against the surface, and pipe a continual line of random 'm' and 'w' shapes in a long string.

If you are piping on paper, it is useful to draw an outline to guide you. Change direction often and keep the lines close. Leave to dry for at least 24 hours, then remove from the paper with a palette knife.

Make three-dimensional filigree designs by gluing together several pieces when dry. Touch the lines together occasionally when piping, so the design is more stable.

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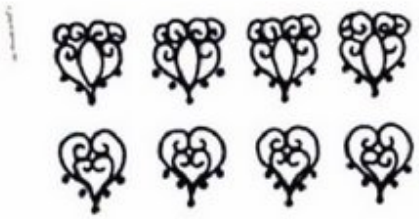
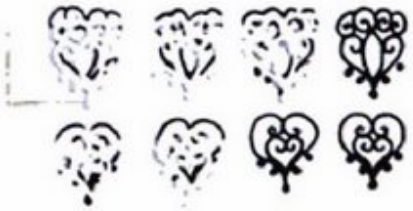
Lace
and extension work

Small pieces of lace icing, piped onto non-stick baking paper and attached to the cake when dry, are another device for neatening unsightly edges. Attach them over the top edge of garrett frills or extension work. Extension work consists of parallel lines of royal icing piped from the cake's surface to a 'bridge' of piping constructed on the cake. There are two basic shapes of bridgework: the first is built up by piping loops of the same size directly on top of each other, as shown here; the second starts with small loops, which are overpiped with longer loops, increasing in length.

Lace



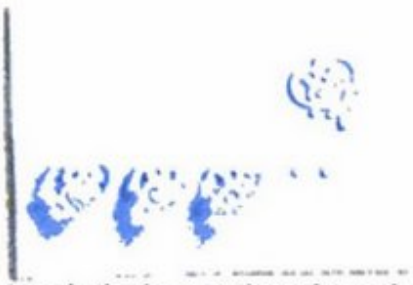
Trace the pattern for the lace onto paper and repeat as many times as you like, leaving a little room between each piece.



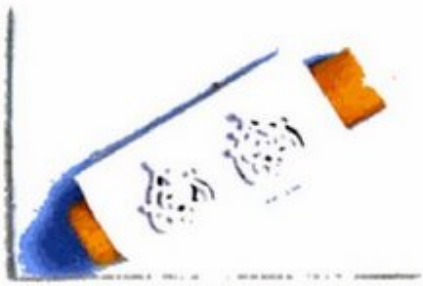
Place a piece of non-stick baking paper over the pattern. Fit a piping bag with a 0 or 00 tube, fill with royal icing and pipe over the patterns, ensuring the lines touch to give strength to the lace.

When the lace is dry, colour the pieces with dusting powder or chalk colours.

Carefully lift the lace from the paper by folding back the paper and sliding a spatula under the icing pieces.



Attach the lace to the cake with a dot or line of royal icing (this will depend on the design of the lace—you don't want to see the icing 'glue' beneath), piped either onto the cake or the edge of the lace.



You can make curved lace by drying pieces draped over a piece of dowel. Remember to make plenty of extra lace as you will always break some pieces. If you are transporting the cake, take some spares with you.

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Extension work

Make a paper template for the curved shapes of the bridgework, ensuring that the pattern will fit evenly in the space allowed and that all the divisions of the 'bridge' are equal.

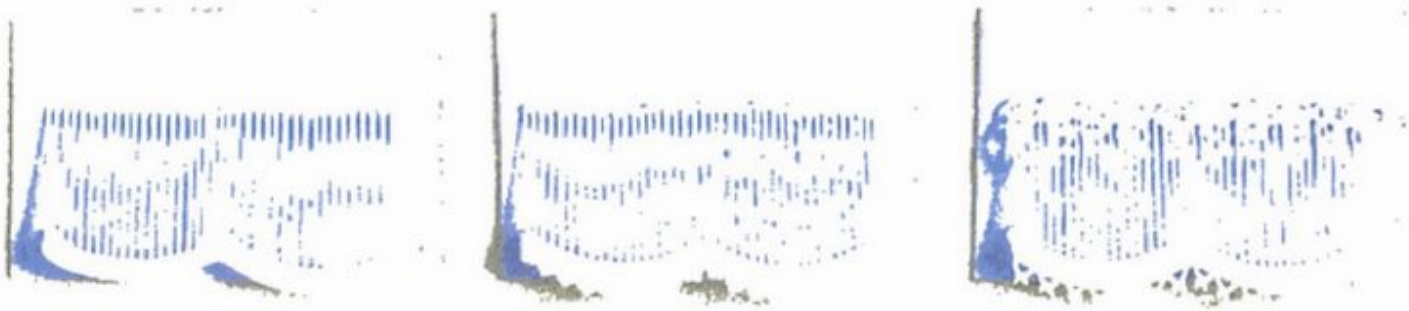
Mark the bridgework and the top of the extension work on the cake with a scriber. Remove the template before piping.

Pipe a loop of icing over the scribed line. Then work around the cake, piping over the scribed lines so that they touch.

Pipe a second loop directly on top of the first loop to make the start of a 'bridge'.

Continue building up the loops on top of each other, until you have several layers and the bridgework seems strong and secure. (You can also strengthen these by painting with thinned icing.)

Using a number 1 or 0 tube, pipe parallel lines from the top scribed line to the bridge you have made. These lines should be straight and close enough not to allow another line to be piped between them.



To achieve straight and even lines, tilt the top of the cake slightly towards you, allowing gravity to pull the icing line directly perpendicular. Take care not to stretch the icing.

When each line is complete, stop squeezing and carefully lower the tube under the bridge to break the icing flow. Pipe a row of loops to hide the tops. Finish with piped dots.

Alternatively, attach pieces of sugar lace along the top edge of the extension work.

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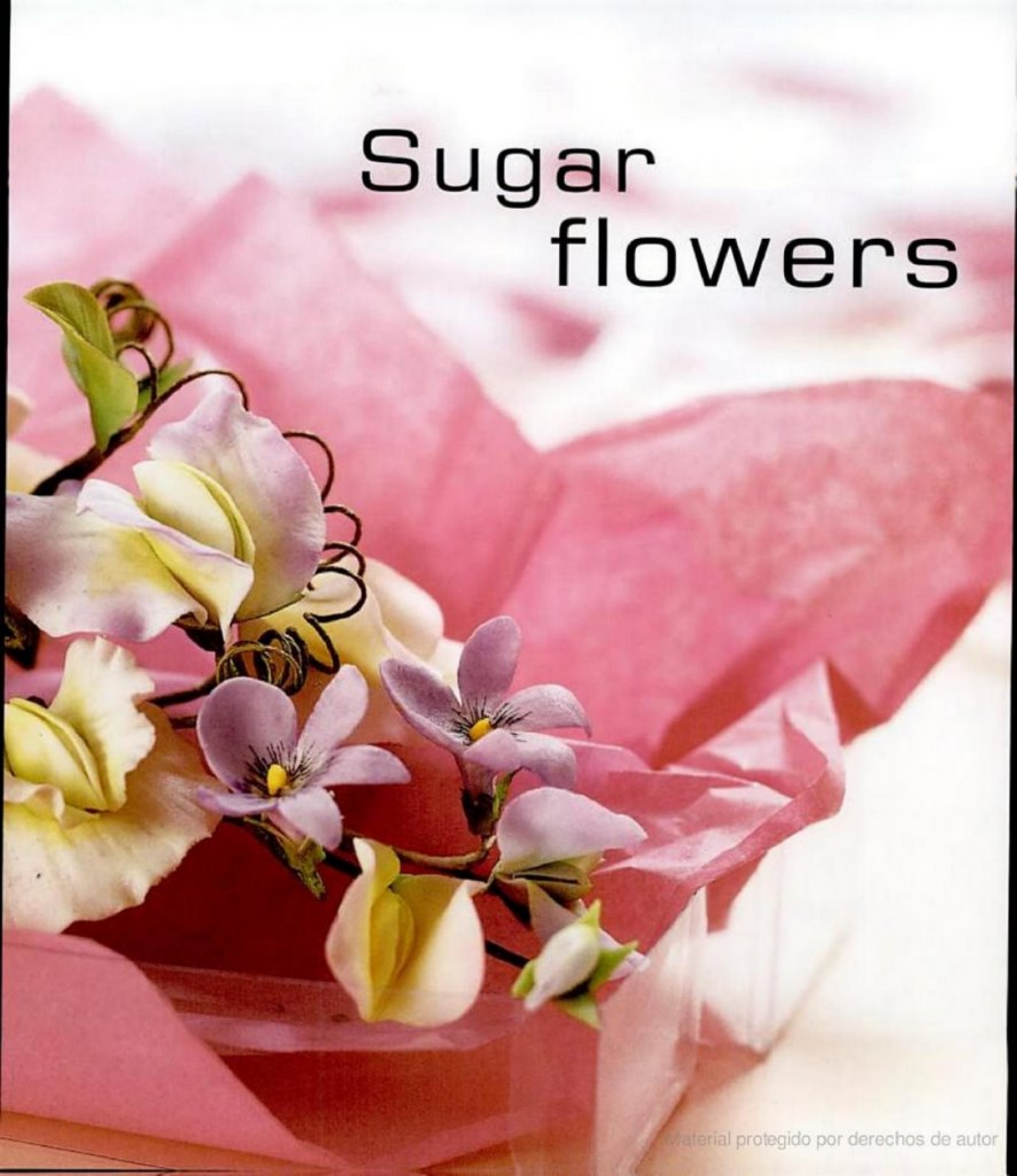
Sugar flowers



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Simple filler flowers

'Filler' flowers are simple blossoms used to fill out a spray or posy. The easiest way to make flowers is by using one of the many types of cutters available—you will need to invest in petal cutters, stamens, florist's wire and tape, and a set of tools for frilling and balling petals. Flower paste is used for all the cutter flowers. Only use a small ball of paste, rolling it out thinly so that it is pliable but not sticky. Thick paste is difficult to frill or cup and the finished flowers may look clumsy. Keep your paste covered with plastic to prevent it drying out. If your paste is too hard, knead in a little egg white or water. If it is too soft, knead in extra icing (confectioners') sugar.

Daffodil

Roll out a small ball of yellow flower paste quite thinly. Cut two flowers with a snowdrop cutter. Shape the edges with a ball tool and pinch at the tip to form a point.

To make the trumpet, form a tiny cone of paste, then open up and thin the narrow end with a skewer. Secure one flower on top of another with water so six petals are visible.

Moisten the trumpet with water and attach to the centre of the petals to finish the daffodil. Insert a moist hooked wire for a stem if necessary. Leave to dry.

Blossom

Thinly roll out a small piece of flower paste. Cut out flowers with a blossom, daphne or primrose cutter and put on a piece of sponge. Shape by pressing a ball tool in the centre.

Use a pin to make a small hole in the middle of each flower. Leave to dry. Thread a stamen through each flower and secure by piping a dot of royal icing in the centre.

Cut some floristry tape into thin strips. Tape a few flowers to a piece of 28-gauge wire. They can be made with coloured paste or brushed with dusting powder when dry.

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Daisy

Roll a small ball of flower paste and flatten into a stubby cone. Insert a moist hooked piece of 26-gauge wire into the centre. Flatten and dry. Paint with yellow-tinted egg white and dip in polenta. Leave to dry.

Roll out white flower paste and cut out daisy shapes with a cutter. Cut the eight petals in half to make 16, rounding the ends with a scalpel. Use a ball tool to curl the petals, pulling gently towards the centre.

Turn over and curl one or two petals in the other direction. Moisten the centre of the petals and insert the yellow centre by poking the wire through the middle of the petals. Press lightly to secure. Dry in a stand.

Stephanotis

To make buds, roll a dumb-bell shape of white paste around moist 26-gauge wire. Cut out a tiny calyx with a cutter, moisten with water and thread the calyx through the wire and up onto the bud base.

For flowers, roll paste into a small ball then press into a dumb-bell with one larger end. Hold upright and squash the larger end down on a board to flatten until large enough to roll into a circle with a dowel.

Place a stephanotis cutter over the top and cut out from the circle. Smooth the back of each petal with a ball tool. Turn over and thin the centre of each petal with a cocktail stick. Push onto wire and add a calyx.

Ivy leaves

Roll out flower paste and use ivy cutters or templates to cut out various sized leaves.

Insert a moist 26-gauge wire through the centre of the leaf. Vein the leaf with an ivy veiner and soften the edges, curving some slightly. Leave to dry.

Dust the leaf with forest green dusting powder and the edges with brown, or paint with paste or liquid colours and leave to dry. (Or cut the leaves from green flower paste.)

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Roses

Roses are perennial favourites, especially for wedding cakes. The rose is made around a central solid cone with the petals added in overlapping layers. Invest in many different sizes of cutters for petals and leaves. Even if you are making white roses, tint or dust them with a hint of colour to give depth and character.

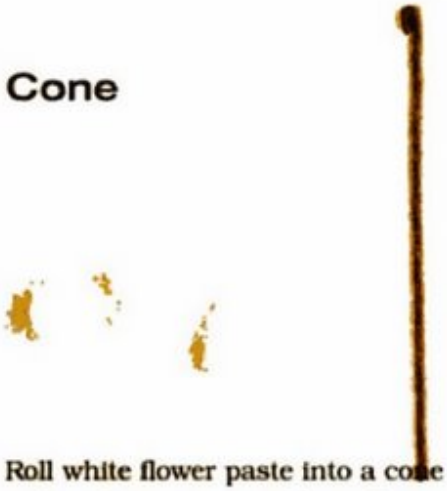
Materials

white and green-tinted flower paste; 18, 26 and 28-gauge wires; green florist's tape; assorted colourings and petal dust

Equipment

rose petal cutters; celstick; large rose petal veiner; rose calyx cutters; rose leaf cutters; extra large leaf cutter; large briar rose leaf veiner; apple tray or cupped former

Cone



Roll white flower paste into a cone with a sharp point and broad base. (Make it no longer than the small rose petal cutter, and smaller for buds.) Cover a half length of 18-gauge wire with tape and hook the end.

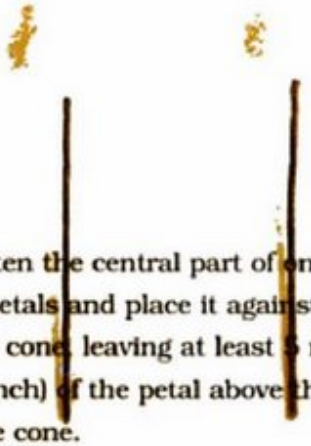
Moisten the wire with egg white and insert into the base of the cone, making sure that the hook goes almost to the tip. Pinch the base of the cone firmly onto the wire. Make as many as you need and dry overnight.

Colour a large amount of flower paste. Start with a pale base colour and tint with petal dust when complete. For white roses, use a touch of melon for a warm glow, or bitter-lemon for a green tinge.

First and second layers

Roll out some coloured flower paste thinly and cut out four petals with the smaller rose petal cutter.

Place the petals on a pad and soften the edges with the rounded end of a large celstick, working half on the paste and half on the pad. Do not frill the petals, simply soften the edges.



Moisten the central part of one of the petals and place it against a dried cone, leaving at least 5 mm (1/4 inch) of the petal above the tip of the cone.

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Tuck the left-hand side of the petal in towards the cone to hide the tip of the cone completely. Wrap the other side of the petal around to form a tight spiral, leaving the end slightly open.

Moisten the bases of the remaining petals. Tuck the first underneath the open edge of the petal on the cone, the second under the first and the third under the second. They should now be fairly evenly spaced.

Moisten the petals and close them tight, pulling them down at an angle rather than wrapping them straight around. There are enough petals on the cone to make a small bud. For a larger rose, open up the last petal.

Third and fourth layers

Roll out some more paste and cut out another three petals with the same size cutter as before. Soften the edges, then mark with a veiner (you don't need to vein small roses). Moisten the base of each petal again.

Tuck the first petal of the third layer under the last petal of the second layer. Continue as before, this time pinching a very gentle central vein on each petal between your finger and thumb as you add it to the rose.

Cut out another three petals and repeat, this time wrapping the petals less tightly.

Fifth layer

Roll out more paste and cut another three petals, using the slightly larger petal cutter. Vein and soften each of the petals as before.

Cup the centre of each petal with the rounded end of a large celstick. Moisten the base of each and attach as before. The centre of each should cover a join in the previous layer.

The rose should now be quite open; curl back the petal edges with your fingers or a cocktail stick. This is termed a 'half rose'. Most bouquets use more half roses than full ones.

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Sixth layer

The sixth layer can either follow on as before or the petals can be wired individually. Roll out a small piece of paste, leaving a thicker ridge down the centre (this ridge should be very subtle).

Cut out the petal, using the same size cutter as before. Hook and moisten the end of a 26-gauge wire. Insert only into the base of the ridge. Soften the edges and mark with the veiner.

Stroke the centre of the petal towards yourself to stretch it and cup it slightly. Curl the edges back a little at this stage. Place into an apple tray former to dry. Repeat to make 8 to 10 petals.

Assembly and colouring

Taping the petals around the rose centre and then petal dusting gives a balanced result. Mix together primrose, lemon and white petal dust. Dust in at the base of each petal on the inside and heavier on the back.

Next, mix together the selected main colour (we used a mixture of apricot and plum petal dust). Start by dusting the centre of the rose, firmly and quite strong in colour.

Gradually dust the outer petals, starting at the edges and fading down to the base.

Calyx

Roll a ball of mid-green flower paste into a cone and pinch out the base to form a hat shape.

Using a small cocktail stick, roll out the base to make it a little thinner. Place the calyx cutter over the top and cut out. Elongate each sepal by rolling with the cocktail stick.

Place the calyx cutter on a pad and cup the inner part of each of the sepals. Dust the inner calyx with a mixture of white and moss green to make it paler.

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Make fine cuts in the edges of each sepal to give a 'hairy' appearance.

Moisten the centre of the calyx and attach it to the back of the rose or bud, positioning each sepal to cover a join between two outer petals. On a full rose it would curl right back and on a bud it would be tight.

Dust the outer part of the calyx with dark green and moss. Keep the very edges of each sepal much paler. Leave to dry.

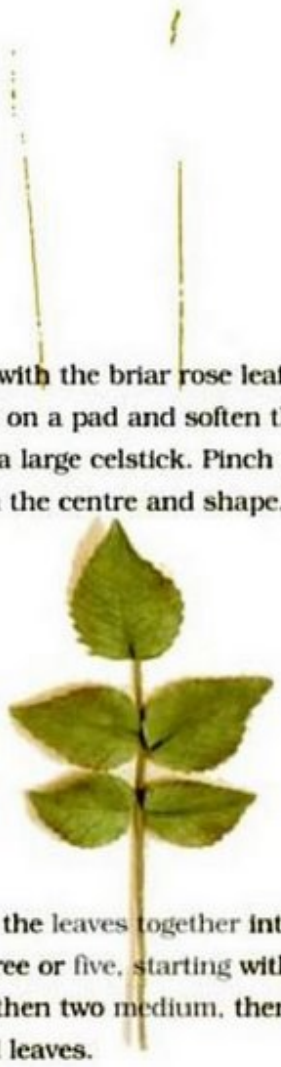
Leaves

Roll out some mid-green flower paste, leaving a thick ridge down the centre. Cut out a selection of sizes using rose leaf cutters.

Dust the back of each leaf with white and moss-green petal dust. Overdust with plum and aubergine on the edges and bring a little of the colour on to the veins. Turn over; dust the edges and one side darker.

Cut lengths of 26- or 28-gauge wire into four. Moisten one end and insert into the thick ridge of a leaf, at least half the length of the leaf.

Dust the upper side of the leaf with dark green and then overdust with either holly/ivy or moss green. Leave to dry.



Vein with the briar rose leaf veiner. Place on a pad and soften the edges with a large celstick. Pinch a vein down the centre and shape.

Tape the leaves together into groups of three or five, starting with a large leaf, then two medium, then two small leaves.

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Sweet peas

We've used a mass of these delicate sweet pea flowers, trailing stems and entwining tendrils, for our fairy-tale wedding cake on page 336. It is a good idea to have a real garden sweet pea next to you while you work to check the fine details and colouring. We've used cutters for the petals, but if you can't find any you could make a template.

Materials

white and green-tinted flower paste; 20, 24, 28 and 30-gauge wires; primrose, spring green, white, plum, deep purple, moss green and dark green petal dust

Equipment

scalpel; rose petal cutters; nile green florist's tape; small rose calyx cutter; celstick; dresden tool; sweet pea cutters; ceramic silk veining tool; fresh sweet pea foliage or peony veiners

Keel

There are two central petals fused together at the base that contain the stamens. This section is known as the keel. Roll a ball of white flower paste into a teardrop with a slight point at the rounded end.

Flatten with your fingers to form a pasty shape. Moisten a hooked 24-gauge wire and insert into the base of the shape. Pinch a sharp angle to the edge of the rounded part.

Using a sharp scalpel, indent and open up the straight edge to represent the opening for the stamens. Curve the straight edge back a little. You will need to make a keel for each of the flowers and buds.

Buds

The keel for some of the smaller buds should be smaller than those for the flowers. Roll out white flower paste thinly and cut out two rose petal shapes with the rose cutters.

Using a sharp scalpel, cut out a very narrow, deep 'V' shape. Frill the edges with a cocktail stick or ball tool. Moisten the base and wrap around to the flat side of the keel.

Frill the second petal, draw down a central vein, moisten the base and wrap around the split petal. Pinch the whole piece together at the base. Curl back the outer petal a little.

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Calyx

Form a ball of green flower paste into a teardrop. Flatten the round end to make a base and place, point up, on the board. Thin the base with a cocktail stick.

Place the small rose calyx cutter over the top and cut out the calyx. Elongate each of the sepals by rolling them with the celstick.

Place the calyx on a pad, flat side down, and hollow out the centre of each sepal with the broad end of the dresden tool.

Turn over and open up the centre of the calyx with the pointed end of a celstick. Moisten the centre and thread on to the back of the flower.

Position two of the sepals onto the back of the outer petal shape. Pinch and curl the tips of the calyx back slightly.

Tape over the stem with florist's tape. To bend the stem, hold the point of the stem directly behind the calyx with fine pliers. Hold the wire at the end and bend this end over to give a neat curve. Colour the bud.

Wing petals

To make wing petals, roll out a piece of white flower paste, leaving a slightly thicker area running halfway down the centre of the petal. Cut a petal with a wing petal cutter.

Hook and moisten the end of a 30-gauge wire and insert it into the base of the thick area on the petal. Pinch the base to secure. Place the petal, ridge side up, on the board.

Vein with a silk veining tool, keeping the point of the tool to the point of the petal, working in a fan shape. Soften by rolling over with a cocktail stick. Make a left and right petal.

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Standard petals

Roll out some more paste, again leaving a thicker ridge. Cut out the petal with the cutter. Insert a hooked 28-gauge white wire into the base of the petal (do not insert the wire too far).

Vein the petal and frill with a silk veining tool. Place the petal on a pad and draw down a central vein on the upper side. Turn the petal over.

With the broad end of the dresden tool, hollow out two small indents, one either side of the central vein at the base of the petal (this will make two raised areas on the front of the petal). Allow to firm up with a curl.

Assembly and colouring

Tape the two wing petals on to either side of the keel, using florist's tape. The long side of each petal should be uppermost.

As the petals are still wet, you can now re-shape them to give a good natural appearance. Tape the standard petal tightly onto the back of the flower with florist's tape.

Squeeze the base of the petals together to form a tight, neat join, then curl the standard petal back a little (the more mature the flower is, the further back this petal will be). Leave to dry before dusting.

Mix a small amount of the primrose and spring green together with a touch of white petal dust. Dust the tip of the keel gently and in at the base of each of the petals.

Dust the petals to colour, starting at the edges and working inwards and down. Use plum and white for pale pink flowers, plum and deep purple for darker pink and deep purple with plum dust for the purple flowers.

Dust the back of the standard petals with a little green mixture. Attach the calyx as for the bud. Dust the calyx with spring and moss green with a touch of white petal dust. Bend the stem a little.

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Leaves, bracts and tendrils

Roll some mid-green flower paste, leaving a ridge down the centre (or use a grooved board). Place a leaf template or fresh leaf on top of the flower paste and cut out the shape (you can also cut these freehand).

Insert a moistened 28-gauge wire into the thick ridge of the leaf. Vein the leaf, by pressing with a fresh leaf or using a suitable veiner.

You can choose whether to give your leaves frilled or flat edges. Frill partially with the broad end of the dresden tool and then over-frill with a cocktail stick.

Pinch the leaf to emphasize the central vein, then dry before dusting. Make the leaves in pairs. Dust in various shades of green. Where the leaf stems join the main stem there are two bracts.

Roll a small teardrop of green paste and insert a moist length of 30-gauge wire into the broad end. Flatten and pinch at the base.

The tendrils grow from the leaf stems not the flower stems. Use 1/4 width tape twisted back on itself to form fine strands.

Put three tendrils together on a 24-gauge wire. Some stems have other tendrils below.

Place two leaves on either side of the tendril stem. The leaves are always in pairs. Secure with green florist's tape. Secure a pair of bracts further down the stem. Tape the flowers and buds into the stems with three or four flowers on them. Use a 20-gauge wire to form the main stem and leave a short length of each of the flower stems showing.

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Poppies

These Icelandic poppies are vibrantly coloured in scarlet and orange but, of course, you can vary the colouring. We've used a tangled bunch for our wedding cake on page 333, but they are also perfect for use in a spray of summer flowers. The flower paste is rolled paper-thin on a grooved board to make the delicate petals. You can steam the flowers very quickly over hot water when they are finished to remove the dry appearance.

Materials

pale green and white-tinted flower paste; 20 and 28-gauge wires; moss green, primrose, lemon and aubergine petal dust; small seed-head stamens; yellow polenta; orange and scarlet craft dust

Equipment

green florist's tape; tiny 8-petal daisy cutter; angled tweezers; non-toxic craft glue; glue gun and non-toxic glue sticks; poppy cutters; orchid veiner; ceramic silk veining tool; leaf texturing tool

Ovary

Roll a ball of green flower paste into a cone shape. Tape over a length of 20-gauge wire, moisten the end with egg white and insert into the point of the cone. Pinch into place and flatten the top. Cover with plastic.

Roll out a small amount of white paste thinly and cut out a daisy shape with the cutter. Secure the daisy to the top of the cone. As the paste is still soft, the daisy will stick (if not, use a little water).

Dust the green part of the ovary with moss green and the daisy shape with a mixture of primrose and lemon. Use angled tweezers to emphasize the shape of the daisy if necessary. Leave to dry completely.

Stamens

You will need half a bunch of seed-head stamens for each flower. Spread the stamens open a little. Apply glue in a strip across the stamens at the length required. Squeeze together and leave to dry.

Cut the stamens to size, apply glue to the base of the ovary and wrap the stamens quickly around. Dry, then dust the lengths with moss green and primrose dust and the tips with primrose and lemon dust.

To make more mature stamens, paint the tips with egg white and dip into polenta. For a flower not fully open, leave the stamens tight around the ovary. Otherwise, bend the stamens open with tweezers.

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Petals

Roll out a small amount of white flower paste very thinly on a grooved board. Cut a petal with a cutter or template. Remove from the board and insert a moistened 28-gauge white wire into the central ridge.

Press the back of the petal onto the orchid veiner. Turn over and vein the upper side. Thin out and frill the top edge with the veining tool, then a cocktail stick. Cup the centre and dry slightly over bubble wrap.

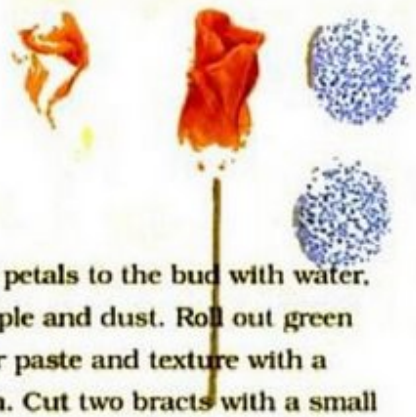
Repeat to make at least one more petal of that size. Cut at least two petals with a larger template or cutter. After veining and frilling, pinch a ridge on the upper surface. Cup the centres and leave to dry.

Colouring and assembly

For vibrant colours, dust the petals while fresh. Dust a patch at the base of each petal on both sides with a mixture of primrose and lemon, then add a small amount of moss green to the very base.

For orange/red poppies, rub the orange craft dust into the paste with a brush, leaving the back a touch paler, and then overdust the edge with scarlet craft dust.

Tape the two small petals tightly behind the stamens. Tape the two larger petals behind the small petals to fill in the gaps. Leave to dry. Steam the flower to remove the dry appearance left by the dusting.



Buds and bracts

Tape over 20-gauge wire several times. Bend an open hook in the end, moisten and insert into an egg-shaped piece of flower paste. Dry. Cut 2–3 petals from very thin white flower paste. Vein and frill as before.

Stick petals to the bud with water, crumple and dust. Roll out green flower paste and texture with a brush. Cut two bracts with a small poppy cutter and hollow out slightly. Stick to the bud.

Snip with scissors to add texture and make an indent with a scalpel to divide the bracts. Dust green, leaving the open edges paler, then overdust with aubergine. Dust the stems and bend into shape.

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Making a flower spray

Fresh flowers and sugar flowers, made on stems of florist's wire, can be taped into sprays in just the same way. Work on a soft surface, such as foam, in case you drop a flower, and strengthen the stems with heavier wires (or by taping several wires together) so that the flowers are stable.

Ribbon loops

These can fill gaps in flower sprays or cushion flowers to prevent them knocking each other. Choose ribbon that complements the colours and size of the flowers. Two of the most commonly used ribbon loops are 'tails' and 'overhand loops'. For a tail, fold a length of ribbon in half, lay a length of 26-gauge wire on top of the fold and tape with florist's tape. Overhand loops are made by wrapping the ribbon around your fingers several times and threading a 28-gauge wire between your index finger and the ribbon loops. Twist the wire tightly around the ribbon. Cut the ribbon tails to the length required and tape the ribbon to the wire, pinching the ribbon at the join.

Posy

This is made by taping the flowers together in a circle with a domed centre. Start with the largest flower in the centre and add to this, gradually turning the posy around, making sure that you add flowers and leaves evenly and incorporating ribbon loops. Cut the ends of the wire stems to the same length and tape together securely with florist's tape.

Return

A return is a small wired spray often used as a supplementary decoration and for building more complicated displays. Returns can be taped together or taped to posies to create a variety of sprays. The overall shape should be an elongated triangle. Start with buds or small flowers at the point of the triangle. Tape these smaller flowers together with florist's tape, working down the stem, adding leaves and larger flowers near the wider base.

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Remember that the spray is three-dimensional and needs height as well as width. Trim away any unwanted wires as you work, so that the main stem remains slender (don't trim away too much or you will weaken the stem). You can tape ribbon loops to the spray at any time.

Teardrop bouquet

This consists of a posy and a return taped together (proficient flower-makers can make this bouquet as one section). Tape the return together neatly, leaving a long taped spike at the end. Tape the posy together, leaving a gap at one side. Place the return into the gap in the posy and mark where the wires cross at the back. Bend the stem of the return to a right angle at the marked point and bind the two stems with a piece of wire. Secure with florist's tape.

Hogarth spray

This consists of two returns and a posy. The returns are longer than usual and are taped to either side of the posy, then bent into an 's' shaped spray.

Crescent

This is a teardrop bouquet with a second return taped to the other end. The returns are curved around towards each other. This is usually made with a large flower in the centre.

Attaching to the cake

When placing sprays on cakes, take care that the wires never go into the cake or icing. Insert a posy holder into the cake for the spray to sit in. The holder should protrude slightly above the icing, so that it can be removed before cutting. Place a piece of sugarpaste in the holder to secure the spray. Royal-iced cakes need a bit more care, to prevent the icing cracking. Use a sharp-pointed knife to make a hole in the icing, turning the tip gently in circles to drill through. Alternatively, sprays can be attached to a base of sugarpaste. Simply poke the stems into a cone of sugarpaste that has been left to 'crust' for 30 minutes.

Left to right: Ribbons can be tied into loops or cut to make tails; The most basic of arrangements is the circular posy; Flowers can be taped into a return; A posy and return can be combined to make a spray.

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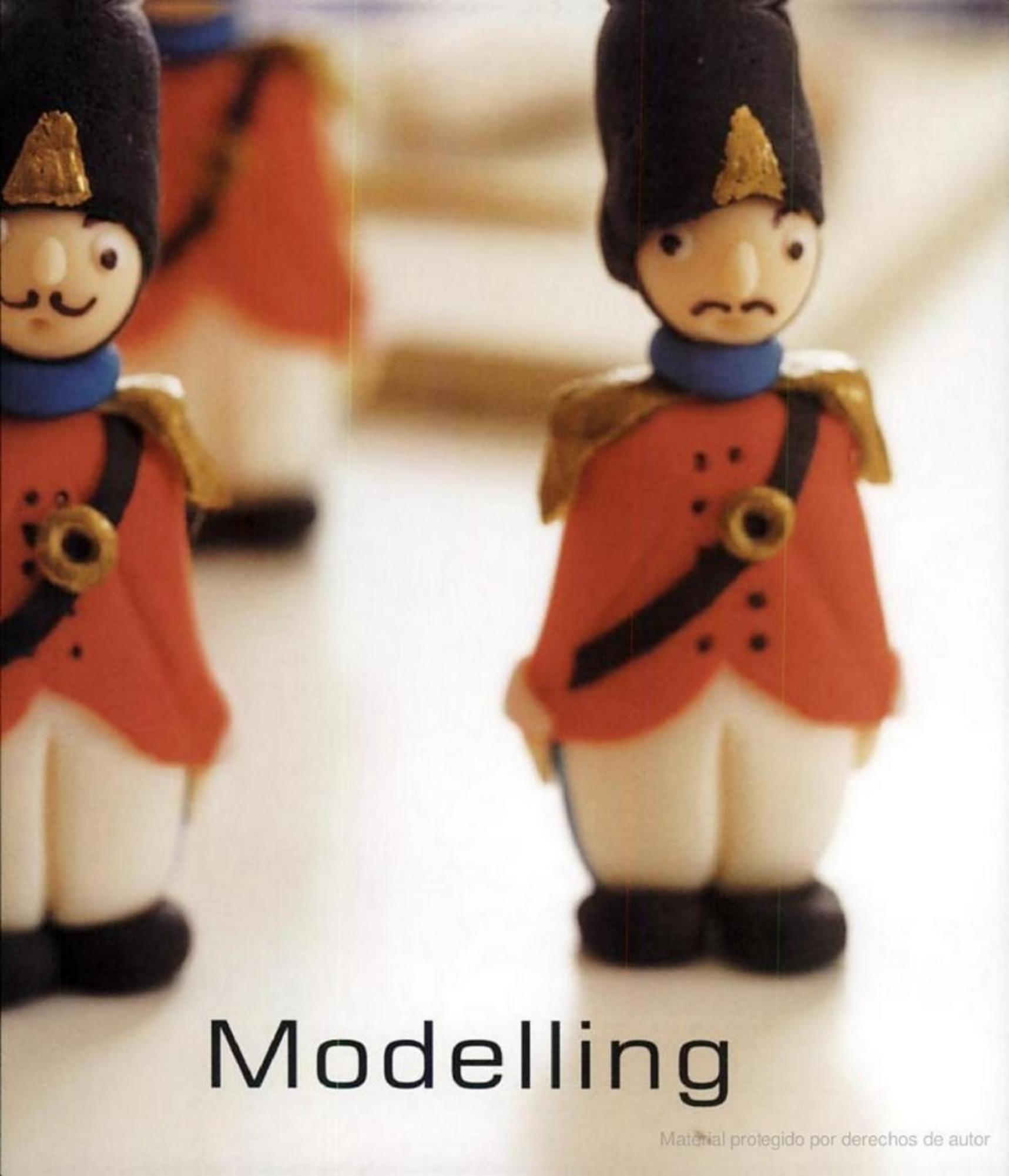

Modelling

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Basic figures

Simple body and arms

Roll modelling paste into a smooth ball and then roll between your palms into a cone shape. Flatten the base of the cone so the figure will stand.

Stroke around the base and sides of the cone with your thumb and index finger to make a thin edge (like the hem of a garment). Make a hole for the neck with a skewer and one on either side for sleeves.

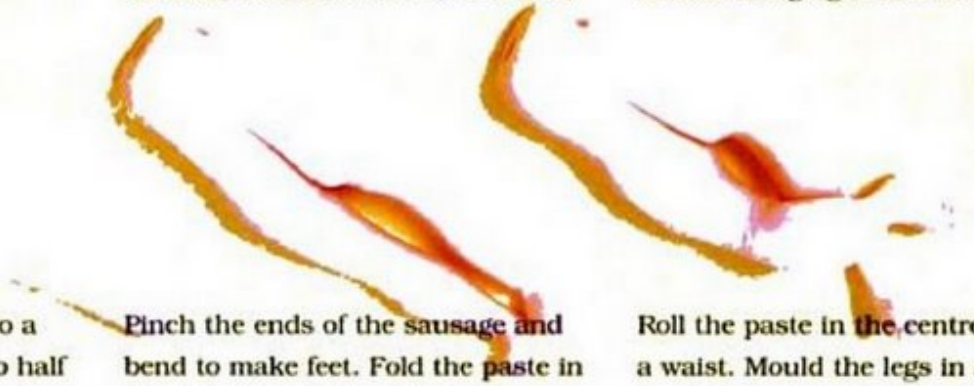
Roll two cone shapes, half the length of the body. Pinch a small peg at the thicker ends. Open the narrow end with a skewer to make sleeves. Brush in the body holes with edible glue and attach the arms.

T-shaped body

Roll the ball of modelling paste into a sausage shape, slightly thicker at one end. Pinch out the paste on either side of the thick end to make arms, rolling between your finger and thumb to lengthen.

Level the base of the body and make a hem as above. Open the sleeves and make a neck hole as above. (You can make trousers by cutting up the centre of the base. Open the bottoms with a skewer to fit shoes.)

For separate trousers, use half the amount of paste for the body and roll into a sausage. Thin out the centre by rolling with a finger. Open both ends with a skewer, then fold in half, bringing the ends together.



All-in-one body

Mould flesh-coloured paste into a thick sausage. Roll each end to half the thickness of the middle. For the ankles, roll to thin a short distance from each end of the sausage.

Pinch the ends of the sausage and bend to make feet. Fold the paste in the middle and bring the legs together. Squeeze the paste at the top of each leg to make knees.

Roll the paste in the centre to make a waist. Mould the legs in standing or sitting positions. Use a skewer to make holes in the body for the head and arms. Leave to dry.

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Arms and feet

To make separate feet, roll a cone and pinch one end to flatten. Nails can be marked with a thin drinking straw cut to the shape of a nail. Mark the end of the foot and cut with a scalpel to separate the toes.

For arms, roll a small piece of flesh-coloured paste into a tapered sausage (the wide end is the shoulder). Thin at the narrow end to make a wrist and flatten the tip to an oval for the hand. Cut fingers with fine scissors.

Gently bend the arm and pinch lightly to make the elbow. On the inside of the shoulder, pinch out a piece of paste to make a small peg to fit the arm hole made in the body. Attach with edible glue when dry.

Heads and hands

Roll flesh-coloured paste into a smooth ball. Put in the palm of one hand and roll the other index finger lightly over the centre to make a fat peanut shape (with practice you can make fat chins and narrow foreheads).

Pinch the paste at the lower back of the head to make a neck. You can insert a piece of uncooked spaghetti into the neck for extra strength. Mark eyes, eyebrows and mouth with the end of a drinking straw.

Attach a small cone of paste to either side of the head for ears. Press the narrow end into the head with a paintbrush handle to hollow out the ear. Make noses with balls or cones. Mark nostrils with a pin after attaching.

Make different hairstyles by texturing rolled-out modelling paste—a curved-blade modelling tool is useful. Use round or daisy cutters to cut out hair, shred the edge and lay over the head.

Allow heads to dry completely before painting. Use well-diluted paste colours and a very fine paintbrush. To give a blush to cheeks, use plum dusting powder mixed with cornflour (cornstarch).

To make separate hands, make a flattened cone of paste, with a narrow end for the wrist. Cut a 'V' from one side for the thumb, then make three cuts for fingers. On large hands, mark the nails with a straw.

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Characters

Father Christmas

Form a large flat cone of red paste for the body and make a mark down the front for the coat opening. Make holes in each side of the top of the body to insert the arms. Make two sleeve shapes and roll two sausages, pressing gently together to form the legs. Make hands, head, ears and nose from flesh-coloured paste. Form an elongated red cone and bend the tip over for the hat. Trim the coat, trousers and hat with white 'fur' and secure to the body. Add a white beard. Cut and mould black paste for the shoes, eyes, belt and buckle and attach.

Little boy rag doll

Form a large flat cone for the body and indent where the legs attach. Make two sausages for legs and wrap red strips around. Make two smaller flesh-coloured sausages, flatten the ends to make hands and wrap in purple sleeves. For the collar, top a purple circle with a white circle and cut out a wedge. Wrap purple icing around the top of the body and green around the base. Add braces with stitch lines. Make a head with indents for eyes. Secure arms, collar and head. Wrap tops of legs in green, attach to the body and add shoes. Paint features. Pipe royal icing hair.

Choir boy

Form a large elongated red cone with a hole in the top to insert the head. Make hands, a head and a nose with flesh-coloured paste. Wrap a small piece of white garrett frill around the hands for sleeves. Make a collar with rounds of frilled red and white paste. Wrap a large red garrett frill over the body, then top with a white frill. Place the collar on top of the cone, insert the head, attach arms and paint features when dry. Attach a small bow at the collar and place a small book of icing in the hands. Pipe royal icing hair with a number 1 or 2 tube.

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Use coloured modelling paste or paint these characters when dry. Edible glue or royal icing will secure pieces together. Work with a tiny amount of white fat on your hands to prevent the paste sticking.

Little girl rag doll

Make a flat cone for the body with indents to attach legs. Make two sausages for legs and wrap red strips around. Make two sausages for arms, flatten the ends and form hands. Wrap blue garrett frill around the arms. Make a head with indents for the eyes. Make a collar of blue and white garrett frills. Roll a large circle of blue paste and inlay with flowers, then frill the edges. Place over the cone to make a dress. Attach the collar, legs, arms and head and add shoes. Paint features. Attach thin strips of twisted paste for hair. Decorate with bows.

Toy soldier

Make a flat white oval for the body and mark legs and arms on the body. Roll a head from paste and indent eyes and a mouth. Make a black cone for the hat. Wrap a curved strip of red paste around the body for the coat. Make epaulettes for the shoulders. Secure a curved strip of blue paste around the 'neck' and attach the head and hat. Add the epaulettes, strapping, trousers, buckle and shoes. Secure two hands to the bottom of the sleeves and place small triangles over the hands to represent cuffs. Paint or pipe on facial features.

Fairy

Mould a body and legs from flesh-coloured paste and form into a sitting position. Make arms and a head. Cut wings and gently frill the edges; paint on a design and leave to dry. Cut a few elongated triangles and snip in around the edges. Attach these over the body for a dress. Attach the head and wings. Roll strips of paste around a skewer to form ringlets. Attach these and some uncurled pieces to the head. Make a crown by cutting halfway down the side of a cylinder of paste; trim the corners into points, curl slightly and place on the hair. Paint on features.

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Animals

Mouse

Divide a piece of paste in half. Mould one half into an oval body, bent into a sitting position, and use the rest for head, arms and feet. Make indents in the body for the head, arms and feet. Roll a ball for the head, moulding a nose and curving it up slightly. Make circular ears, hollowing with a ball tool. Secure to the head. Shape sausages for arms, bending at the elbows, flattening the ends and marking fingers. Secure feet to the body. Attach a thin tail. Paint features when dry.

Teddy bear

Roll a round ball for the body and a slightly smaller one for the head. Make indents on the body for the head, arms and legs. Shape arms and legs from sausages of paste. Cut out circles of darker coloured paste for paws. Secure the head, arms and legs to the body and the paws to the arms and legs. Make ears from small, thickly rolled semi-circles of paste, hollowed in the centre with a ball tool, and attach to the head. Make a muzzle and attach to the face. Paint features when dry.

Dog

Make a long sausage of white paste, place dots of black paste on it, then roll the sausage to blend them. Stretch the front of the sausage and cut down the middle to make legs. Open out a little and indent toes. Stretch out short hind legs and then fold around the body. Make a cone for the head, turning it up at the nose. Cut the front of the head to make a mouth and insert a red tongue. Attach ears, a black spot for the nose, circles for eyes and a twisted roll of paste for the tail.

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Use coloured modelling paste or paint these animals when dry. Edible glue or royal icing will secure pieces together. Work with a tiny amount of white fat on your hands to prevent the paste sticking.

Duck

Make a sausage of white paste, tapered at both ends. Tweak one end upwards and thin out to make a tail. Elongate the other end and mould into a neck and a head. Make indents for eyes and a point at the front of the head to paint the beak. Cut a thin piece of paste into wings. Texture with feathers, using a tool or the end of a drinking straw. Roll black balls for eyes. Cut orange paste into webbed feet. Attach the wings and feet. Press the eyes in place. Paint on the beak when dry.

Pig

Shape a large sausage into a body and make indents where the head and legs will be attached. Make small trotters from ovals with one end flattened and a cut made for trotters. Make the head from another oval, elongated at one end to form a snout. Bend the snout up slightly and make two holes for the nose and a line for the mouth. Make indents for the eyes and insert small balls of black paste. Make ears from circles of paste, cupped with a ball tool. Paint on colouring when dry.

Elephant

Indent a belly button in the centre of a ball of paste. Make small fat sausages for legs and use the end of a drinking straw to mark creases and toes. Make pink circles to represent pads. Make a head from a long oval of paste and stretch one end to make a trunk. Poke nostrils in the end and mark creases. Make indents for eyes and eyebrows. Make ears, thinning and frilling the edges. Secure the legs and head to the body. Secure pads to the legs and ears to the head. Dust when dry.

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Accessories

Shoes

Colour and roll modelling paste thinly. Cut out the soles of the shoes first and then shape the tops. Join pieces with water or edible glue. Add laces and paint details when dry.

Ties

For a bow tie, pinch a rectangle of paste in the centre to narrow and wrap with a small strip of paste. For a long tie, trim both ends of a long rectangle to a point and add a 'knot' of paste at the top. Paint when dry.

Hats

Roll out paste thinly and cut out a circle for the base. Mould the crown shape and attach to the centre of the circle. Decorate around the brim with ribbon and bows.

Tools

Use small pieces of coloured modelling paste, rolled into tiny strips. Dust your fingers with cornflour (cornstarch) to prevent sticking.

Use modelling tools to flatten and hollow out pieces. Follow real tools as a guide and paint or dust with colour when dry.

Books

Trim three sides of a small rectangle of paste to give sharp edges, leaving one gently rounded for the spine. Emboss the top. Paint when dry.

Flower pot

Form a piece of paste into a thimble shape and hollow out the top. Attach a strip of icing around the top edge. Thread cutter flowers onto stamens.

Insert the flower stamens into the top of the pot. Paint the pot when dry and paint inside the top rim to represent soil.

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Fruit

Roll small pieces of paste into balls. Secure leaves to the tops of apples and pears. Break a clove in half and insert a straight piece into the top for the stalk and the remaining piece in the bottom of the fruit.

Roll lemons and oranges over a nutmeg grater to give texture. To make blackberries, roll tiny balls of paste and press together gently. Insert a green stem. Insert black stamens into red balls for cherries.

For strawberries, roll into shape and make indents for the seeds. Add a green calyx to the tops. Paint all fruits in realistic colours when dry.

Bows

Cut a strip of thinly rolled paste and fold in half loosely to make a loop. Gather the ends to crease. Repeat to make another loop. Trim and gather strips to make tails. Cover the central join with a small gathered strip.

Roll a strip of paste, fold in half and moisten the ends. Repeat to make a shorter length and secure on top. Roll a small strip and fold over the central join.

Cut strips of thinly rolled paste and twist over, joining the ends. Dry, then join in the centre with royal icing. Cut ribbon tails and secure underneath with royal icing.

Christmas trinkets

For parcels, mould paste into cubes or rectangles and add strips of paste for ribbon. Finish with bows or add green leaves and red balls to represent holly or poinsettias.

For the candy canes, twist red and white strips of paste together and hook over the end into a cane shape.

For the tree, cut four half Christmas trees from green paste. Leave to dry. Join with royal icing, supporting until set. Make more shapes to assemble a standing tree.

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Backgrounds

Snow

Peak royal icing and dust heavily with icing (confectioners') sugar.

Sand

Colour caster (superfine) sugar orange-brown with liquid or paste colouring and allow to dry on a paper-lined tray. Sprinkle over soft royal icing or moistened sugarpaste.

Bricks

Cut out rectangles of brick-coloured sugarpaste. Colour with orange and red dusting powder, then fill the joins with cement-coloured royal icing, piped with a number 2 tube.

Stone

Cut out irregular rectangles of stone-coloured sugarpaste and attach to the iced cake or board by moistening with water. Fill the joins with mortar-coloured royal icing, piping with a number 2 tube.

Grass

Cover the cake or board with green sugarpaste and stipple with a sponge dipped in brown-green royal icing, or use a clay gun to create tufts of sugarpaste.

Grass

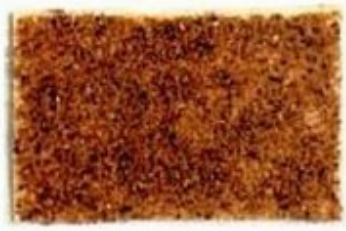
Colour desiccated coconut or caster (superfine) sugar with green liquid or paste colouring, then dry on a paper-lined tray. Sprinkle onto soft royal icing or moistened sugarpaste.

Roof tiles

Cut circles of thin, coloured sugarpaste and then lay out on the cake or board, overlapping each row. Colour with orange, red and brown dusting powders, when dry.

Floorboards

Roll together three shades of brown sugarpaste. Flatten and cut into lengths. Make woodgrain marks with a dresden tool. Make holes for nails and cover with pieces of grey.



Earth

Use a clay gun to create 'crumbs' of dark brown marzipan or sugarpaste. Sprinkle over the moistened cake or board.

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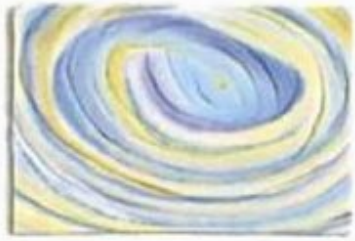
Inlay flowers

Roll out coloured sugarpaste to the same thickness as the icing on the cake. Remove flower shapes from the cake with a cutter. Use the same cutter to insert coloured flowers in the holes left. Smooth over.

Sea

Coat the board or cake with blue sugarpaste. While still soft, push indents with your thumb to make waves. Brush on white royal icing 'surf' at the top of each wave.

Pond



Blend sugarpastes tinted blue, white and green, leaving streaky. Roll into a cylinder, then into a coil. Roll out, then mark ripples on the surface with a blunt tool, following the swirls of colour.

Window

Make a suitable background colour, then place a piece of leaf gelatine, cut to the same size, over the shape. Edge with strips of brown sugarpaste to make a frame. Score diamonds for leadlight windows.

Marble

Mix small amounts of coloured sugarpaste into larger amounts of a paler sugarpaste. Do not mix thoroughly, so the marble remains streaky. You can paint in more streaks with a fine brush.

Tree bark

Thinly roll out brown sugarpaste. Make close parallel lines with the back of a knife. Roll a thin spiral of sugarpaste and attach, then flatten to make a wood knot. Colour with brown dusting powder.

Paving

Paint rows of slightly uneven paving slabs directly onto sugarpaste with diluted food colourings, using a mixture of light browns, beige, green or blue.

Cobbles

Blend light brown and grey marzipan or sugarpaste, without thoroughly mixing. Cut into pieces and roll into irregular shapes. Flatten and attach to the cake or board.

Rocks

Blend light brown and grey marzipan or sugarpaste, without thoroughly mixing. Cut into pieces and roll into irregular shapes.

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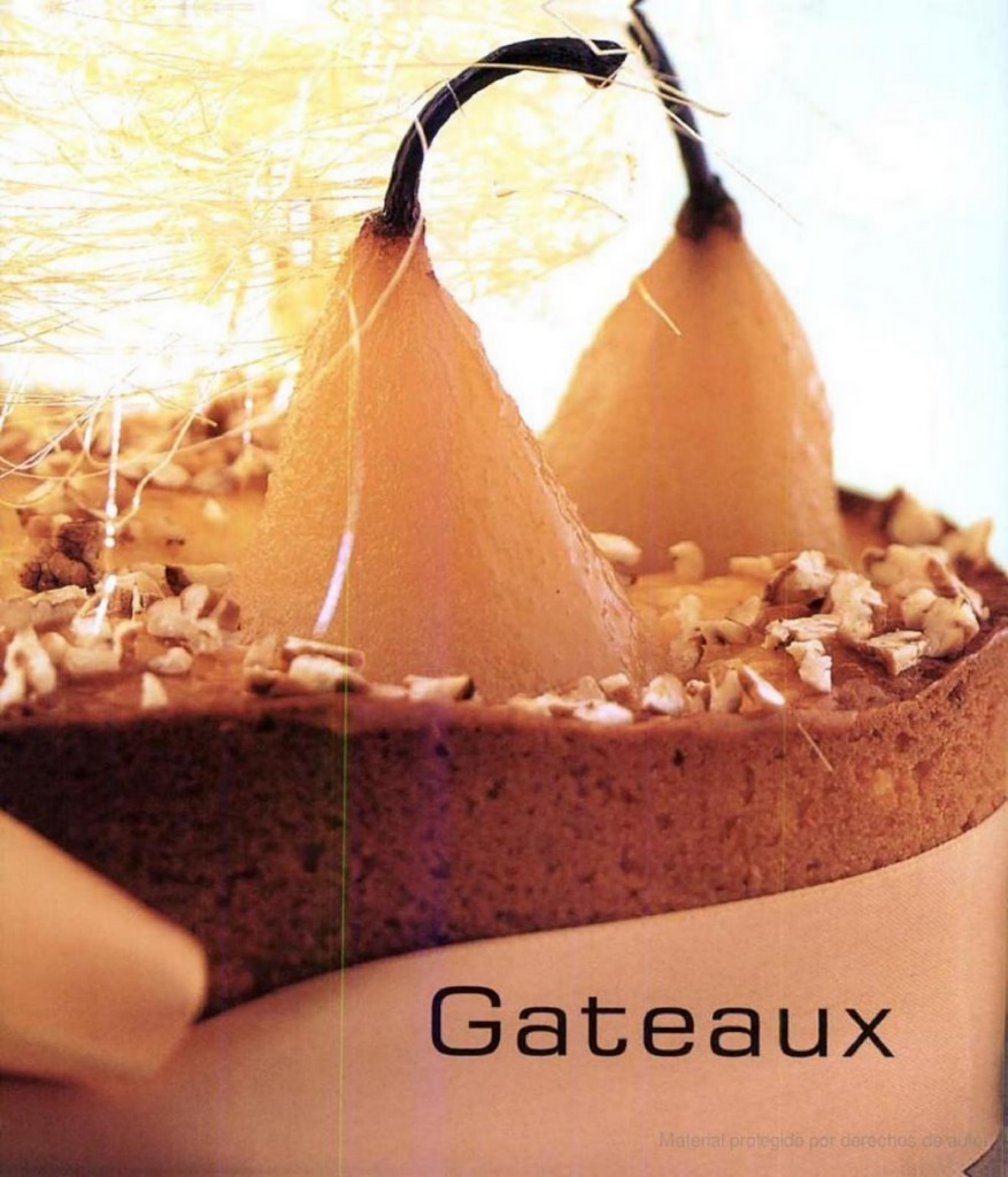

Gateaux

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White chocolate cream gateau

This gateau is richly layered with white chocolate cream and fresh berries. We've used strawberries and raspberries but you can use whatever is in season. There are no tricky techniques and this spectacular cake is simple for a beginner to make.

125 g (4 oz) cream cheese

60 g (2 oz) butter

185 g (6 oz) caster (superfine) sugar

2 eggs, lightly beaten

100 g (3½ oz) dark chocolate, melted

250 g (8 oz) plain (all-purpose) flour

30 g (1 oz) cocoa powder

1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

500 ml (16 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream, whipped

250 g (8 oz) strawberries or raspberries, quartered

whole strawberries, raspberries or young berries

White chocolate cream

125 g (4 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

60 ml (2 fl oz) cream

Equipment

20 cm (8 inch) round cake tin

Baking the cake

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). Brush the cake tin with melted butter or oil. Line the base and side with non-stick baking paper. Using electric beaters, beat the cream cheese, butter and sugar in a small bowl until light and creamy. Add the eggs gradually, beating thoroughly after each addition. Add the melted chocolate and beat until smooth.

Transfer the mixture to a large bowl. Using a metal spoon, fold in the sifted flour, cocoa and bicarbonate of soda alternately with 185 ml (6 fl oz) water. Stir until the mixture is smooth. Pour evenly into the tin and smooth the surface. Bake for 45–50 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean. Leave the cake in the tin for 5–10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool.

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Add the melted chocolate to the mixture and beat until smooth.

Leave the cake to cool in the tin for 5–10 minutes before turning it out onto a wire rack to let it cool completely.

Heat the cream and white chocolate buttons in a bowl over simmering water—if you heat directly the chocolate may seize.

White chocolate cream

To make the white chocolate cream, combine the white chocolate buttons and cream in a small heatproof bowl. Bring a small pan of water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the bottom of the bowl sit in the water). Stir over the hot water until melted and the mixture is smooth. Cool in the refrigerator until spreadable, stirring occasionally.

Assembling the cake

Cut the cake horizontally into three even layers. Place the base layer on a serving plate. Spread with half of the white chocolate cream, top with one-fifth of the whipped cream, then half of the quartered berries. Top with the second layer of cake and repeat the layering with the remaining white chocolate cream, a quarter of the remaining whipped cream and the rest of the quartered berries. Top with the last layer of cake. Spread the cake side and top evenly with the remaining whipped cream. If you have a piping bag you can pipe swirls of cream on top of the cake. Decorate the top of the cake with the whole or halved berries.

Note The basic cake can be made several days in advance and stored in the refrigerator.

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Almond
and apple gateau

Marzipan fruit are an easy starting place for beginners to sugar modelling (refer to the techniques for modelling fruit on page 87) and this cake is very simple. Grated apple is stirred into the basic Madeira cake mixture before baking, and you could do exactly the same thing with pear. You can toast the almonds yourself on a baking tray in a 180°C (350°F/Gas 4) oven for 8–10 minutes.

1 quantity Madeira cake mixture for 20 cm (8 inch) round cake

2 apples
125 g (4 oz) ground almonds
1/2 teaspoon mixed spice
500 g (1 lb) marzipan
icing (confectioners') sugar
4 tablespoons apricot jam
315 ml (10 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream
1 tablespoon icing (confectioners') sugar
125 g (4 oz) flaked almonds, toasted
whole cloves
red and green food colourings
mixed spice, to dust

Equipment

23 cm (9 inch) round cake tin
fine paintbrush

Baking the cake

Preheat the oven to 160°C (315°F/Gas 2–3). Grease and line the base and side of the cake tin with non-stick baking paper. Peel, core and grate the apples and stir into the cake mixture with 60 g (2 oz) of the ground almonds and the mixed spice. Spread into the tin, level the surface and bake for about 1 1/4 hours or until firm and a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean. Leave the cake in the tin for 5–10 minutes before turning onto a wire rack to cool completely.

Assembling the cake

Halve the marzipan and set one half aside. Halve the remainder and roll out each piece, on a surface dusted with icing sugar, to a 20 cm (8 inch) circle. Split the cake horizontally into three even layers.

Spread the bottom layer of the cake with 2 tablespoons of the jam, then cover with a round of marzipan. Place a second cake layer on top and cover with the remaining jam and the second marzipan circle. Top with the remaining layer of cake.

Put the cream in a bowl with the remaining ground almonds and the tablespoon of icing sugar, and whip until soft peaks form. Spread the cake with the cream mixture, using a palette knife. Press the flaked almonds around the side of the cake. Mark the top of the cake into 16 portions with the back of a knife.

Marzipan apples

Divide the remaining marzipan into about 19 portions and form each one into a ball measuring 2 cm (3/4 inch) in diameter. Remove the round centres of some of the cloves and press the stem end of a clove into each marzipan ball. Cut the wide ends off more cloves and press the

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Press the flaked almonds into the side of the cake, then use the back of a knife to mark the cake into 16 portions.

stems into the opposite sides of the balls to make stalks. Paint the apples with diluted red and green food colourings. Arrange around the top edge of the cake and then sprinkle the whole cake top with a little mixed spice.

Note This cake freezes well. You can ice and decorate it with the almonds, but don't add the marzipan apples until the cake has thawed.

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Pink lazy daisy

We chose delicate pink daisies and pink feathered icing for our lazy daisy, but you could try simple yellow and white flowers, and tint your icing lemon yellow. Don't use fruit cake for this recipe—the combination of fruit cake and cream cheese frosting isn't good.

two 22 cm (9 inch) round cakes

Cream cheese frosting

375 g (13 oz) cream cheese, softened

75 g (2½ oz) butter, softened

90 g (3 oz) icing (confectioners') sugar, sifted

1 teaspoon vanilla essence

Glacé icing

185 g (6 oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

1 teaspoon soft butter

1–2 tablespoons milk or water

pink food colouring

140 g (4½ oz) roasted hazelnuts, roughly chopped

silk, sugar or fresh pink daisies

Covering the cake

To make the cream cheese frosting, beat the cream cheese and butter with electric beaters until smooth and creamy. Gradually beat in the icing sugar and the vanilla and beat until thick and creamy. Set aside half a cupful of the frosting. Slice both cakes in half horizontally and place one half on a serving plate. Spread the cake layer with a layer of frosting and top with another layer of cake. Repeat the layering with the remaining frosting and cake (the top layer of cake will not be spread with frosting). Spread the reserved frosting over the side of the cake and press the hazelnuts firmly all around the side.

Glacé icing

To make the glacé icing, sift the icing sugar into a bowl and add the butter and enough milk or water to make a thick pourable paste. Tint 2 tablespoons of the icing pink and spoon into a paper piping bag. Pour the white icing over the cake and quickly spread to the edges. (Any drips can be trimmed off later when the icing has set.) Snip the end off the piping bag and pipe even rows of pink icing across the top of the white icing. Before it sets, gently drag a skewer across the pink lines. Then drag the skewer over the pink lines in the other direction—this will give a feathered effect. (The pink icing must be piped over the white icing while they are both wet. If the icing sets there is no alternative but to lift it off the cake and start again.) Leave the icing to set.

Trim off any icing that has drizzled down the side of the cake. Trim the stems from the pink daisies and place around the base, saving a couple for the centre.

Pipe even rows of pink icing over the top of the white, when still wet.

Drag the skewer over the lines of wet pink icing, in both directions.

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Gateau tiramisu

Tiramisu means 'pick-me-up' in Italian and that's certainly what this cake will do. You can make the cake up to two days in advance and store it in the fridge, but don't put the chocolate wafers around the edge until you are ready to serve or they will soften.

two 22 cm (9 inch) round genoise sponge cakes

1 tablespoon instant coffee powder or granules

190 g (6½ oz) caster (superfine) sugar

80 ml (2¾ fl oz) Kahlua

4 egg yolks

500 g (1 lb) mascarpone cheese

300 ml (10 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream

cocoa powder

500 g (1 lb) chocolate cream wafers (long thin cigar-shaped wafers)

Equipment

wide brown ribbon

Mascarpone cream

Put the coffee powder and 110 g (3½ oz) of the sugar in a small pan with 250 ml (8 fl oz) water. Stir over low heat until dissolved. Remove from the heat and cool slightly, then stir in the Kahlua.

Beat the egg yolks and remaining sugar in a heatproof bowl. Place over a pan of barely simmering water. Beat for 3 minutes with electric beaters, or until it is thick and fluffy and leaves a trail on the surface. Transfer to a clean bowl. Beat for 3 minutes, or until cool.

Gently stir the mascarpone in a large bowl to soften it. Add the egg yolk mixture, then the cream, beating slightly until thick.

Assembling the cake

Slice the cakes in half horizontally. Place a layer of cake on a plate and brush with coffee syrup. Spread with a fifth of the mascarpone cream. Top with another layer of the cake and continue layering with the coffee syrup, mascarpone cream and cake, finishing with mascarpone cream. Refrigerate the cake and remaining mascarpone cream for 1 hour.

Dredge the top of the cake with cocoa and spread the remaining mascarpone cream around the side. Trim the wafers to stand a little higher than the cake and press gently into the side of the cake. Tie the ribbon around the cake and fasten with a bow.

Beat the egg yolks and sugar in a heatproof bowl over a pan of barely simmering water.

Build up the layers of cake brushed with the coffee syrup and the mascarpone cream.

Trim the chocolate wafers to stand just higher than the top of the cake and arrange them around the edge of the cake.

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Mocha gateau

This cake uses a mocha-flavoured genoise cake base, but any sponge or moist rich chocolate cake could be used instead. The chocolate ganache is also flavoured with coffee, which is added just after the cream, when making the ganache recipe on page 25.

two 22 cm (9 inch) round mocha-flavoured genoise sponge cakes

150 ml (5 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream

1 tablespoon icing (confectioners') sugar

¼ teaspoon vanilla essence

1 tablespoon instant coffee powder

300 g (10 oz) chocolate ganache

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate, chopped

Equipment

number 1 piping tube

wide cream ribbon

wide brown ribbon

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template actual size

Use a bowl, large cutter or cake tin to mark a circle on top of the gateau. Position the pieces of lace spaced slightly apart and tilted a little backwards.

Layering the cake

Whip the cream to soft peaks, then continue whipping the cream while gradually adding the icing sugar and vanilla. Use the cream to sandwich the cakes together. Place on a plate or board.

Mocha ganache

Dissolve the coffee powder in 2 teaspoons of boiling water in a cup. Make up the chocolate ganache mixture, adding the coffee with the cream. Leave until the mixture is thickened but remains level in the bowl.

Pour the ganache over the cake and smooth down the side with a palette knife. Leave in a cool place to set.

Chocolate lace

To make the chocolate lace, make several tracings of the template, above, on the same piece of paper. You will need about 35 motifs, allowing for a few breakages. Secure the tracings to a flat surface and cover with a piece of acetate or non-stick baking paper. Secure in place with tape. Melt the chocolate and put it in a paper piping bag fitted with a number 1 piping tube. Quickly pipe over the lace motif outlines and then leave to dry.

Positioning the lace

Using an upturned bowl, cutter or cake tin about 18 cm (7 inches) in diameter and with a very fine rim, carefully mark a central circle on the top of the cake. Carefully peel the paper away from the chocolate lace. Gently press the lace pieces into the marked circle, tilting each backwards and spacing them slightly apart. Chill until set.

Finishing touches

Just before serving, wrap a double layer of ribbon around the cake.

Note The coffee flavouring added to both sponge and ganache can be omitted to make a plain dark chocolate gateau.

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Passionfruit
and lemon curd sponge

The sponge is layered with creamy lemon curd and then drizzled with a passionfruit topping that runs irresistibly down the side of the cake. The delicate pieces of chocolate lattice are piped onto non-stick baking paper and are easy for beginners to make.

two 22 cm (9 inch) round classic sponge cakes

Passionfruit topping

185 g (6 oz) passionfruit pulp (you will need 6–8 fresh passionfruit)

3 tablespoons orange juice

2 tablespoons caster (superfine) sugar

1 tablespoon cornflour (cornstarch)

50 g (1¾ oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

Lemon cream

3 egg yolks

75 g (2½ oz) caster (superfine) sugar

2 teaspoons finely grated lemon rind

90 ml (3 fl oz) lemon juice

180 g (6 oz) unsalted butter, chopped

300 ml (10 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream

Passionfruit topping

For the passionfruit topping, strain the passionfruit to separate the juice and seeds—you will need 125 ml (4 fl oz) passionfruit juice and 1½ tablespoons of seeds. Put the passionfruit juice, seeds, orange juice and sugar in a small pan. Mix the cornflour with 3 tablespoons water until smooth, then add to the pan. Stir over medium heat until the mixture boils and thickens, then pour into a small bowl, lay a sheet of plastic wrap directly on the surface to prevent a skin forming and refrigerate the topping until cold.

Chocolate lattices

Bring a pan containing a little water to a simmer, then remove from the heat. Place the chocolate buttons in a heatproof bowl, then place the bowl over the pan. Don't let the base of the bowl sit in the water. Stir the chocolate over the heat until it has completely melted. Spoon the chocolate into a paper piping bag, snip off the end and pipe lattice patterns onto a sheet of non-stick baking paper. Leave to set.

Lemon cream

To make the lemon cream, put the yolks and sugar in a jug and beat well. Strain into a heatproof bowl and add the lemon rind, juice and butter. Place the bowl over a pan of gently simmering water and stir constantly for 20 minutes, or until the mixture thickens enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Cool the lemon curd completely. Fold the lemon curd into the thick cream and beat until it has the texture of thick sour cream.

Assembling the cake

Slice each cake in half horizontally. Place one layer of cake onto a serving plate. Spread with a quarter of the lemon cream, then top with another layer of cake. Repeat with the remaining lemon cream and cake, finishing with a layer of lemon cream. Roughen the lemon cream with a fork.

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Spoon the melted white chocolate buttons into a piping bag and pipe lattice patterns on the paper.

Stir the lemon curd over the heat until it thickens enough to coat the spoon.

Finish the layers with lemon cream, and roughen the surface with a fork.

Once the chocolate lattices have set, gently peel away the paper.

Stir the passionfruit topping slightly to make it pourable (thin it with a little orange juice if necessary), then pour evenly over the cake, allowing some to run down the side. Peel the chocolate lattices from the paper and arrange on top of the cake.

Note The passionfruit topping and lemon curd can be stored for up to three days. Assemble the cake an hour before serving and don't pour over the topping until ready to serve.

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Chocolate decorations

Melting chocolate

Decorations can be made using melted dark, milk or white chocolate, or couverture. Take care when melting chocolate as it can overheat and seize. Break into small pieces and place in a heatproof bowl over a pan of just simmered water, without letting the bowl sit in the water. Once melted, stir lightly. Or melt in short bursts in the microwave.

Couverture

Used by professionals because it melts and coats well, giving a glossy finish and good flavour. But it must be tempered before use to make it stable. To temper couverture, break it into small pieces and melt in a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water until it reaches 46°C (115°F) on a sugar thermometer. Remove from the heat and stir until cooled to 27°C (80°F). Return to the heat and heat to 31°C (88°F). It is now tempered and ready to use.

Covering a cake

For a 20 cm (8 inch) cake you will need 250 g (8 oz) melted chocolate. Place the cake on a wire rack and pour the chocolate over it. Spread evenly with a palette knife to cover the cake. Leave to set. (Cut the cake with a hot dry knife to prevent cracking.)

Caraque curls

Pour melted chocolate onto a marble slab or smooth surface. Spread quite thinly and leave until just set. Draw the blade of a large knife, held at an angle of 45°, across the surface of the chocolate to shave off a thin layer that will roll into curls. Transfer to a plate until ready to use. Make striped curls by pouring melted chocolate onto the marble and making ridges through it with a fork. Leave to set and then pour a different coloured chocolate over the top. Leave until just set and then scrape off curls. You could also pour the different coloured chocolates side by side to make striped curls.

Leaves

Wash the underside of non-toxic leaves (rose or camellia) and dry well. Brush with a thin layer of melted chocolate. Set, then peel away the leaf.

Cut outs

Spread melted chocolate thinly over non-stick baking paper or acetate and leave to set. Cut out shapes with biscuit cutters and stick to the cake with melted chocolate. Use dark chocolate on a light cake and white chocolate on a dark cake.

Boxes

Spread melted chocolate in a thin even layer over non-stick baking paper. When it has begun to set, cut it into squares with a sharp knife. Use melted chocolate to glue the sides together.

Cases

Small foil petit four cases make perfect moulds for shaping chocolate cases. Use the back of a teaspoon to thickly coat the inside base and side of the foil case with melted chocolate. Scoop out the excess and then turn the case upside down to set. Peel away the case. For a less formal look, spread a circle of melted chocolate onto a piece of plastic wrap and drape it over the base of an upturned small glass. Peel away the plastic wrap when the chocolate has set completely. Cases can be filled with ganache or whipped cream, scattered over a cake or filled with truffles.

Runouts

Trace a design onto paper (use designs from greeting cards, letters from books or make up your own). Secure the paper to a flat surface and place non-stick baking paper or acetate on top. Pipe a little melted chocolate over the outlines. Leave to set. Place more melted chocolate (either of the same or a different colour) into another bag, fitted with a clean tube. Fill in the outline, easing chocolate into the corners with a cocktail stick. When set, carefully pull away the paper.

Dipped fruits

Wash and dry the fruit (grapes, cherries, strawberries). Line a tray with paper. Keep the melted chocolate in a bowl over hot water to keep it liquid. Hold each fruit by its stalk end and half-dip in the chocolate, twisting slightly. Let the excess drip back into the bowl, then lay on the paper to dry. Use on the same day.

Left to right: Melting chocolate over hot water; Caraque curls in two colours; Leaves painted with chocolate; Cut outs, boxes and cases for truffles; Chocolate lace runouts; Dipped fruit.

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Cappuccino truffle cake

Once you've learnt how to make your own cappuccino truffles, you might never come out of the kitchen again. Of course, if you don't have time to make your own you can always use bought chocolates. Fruit cakes are not suitable for this recipe.

two 22 cm (9 inch) square cakes

Coffee buttercream

170 ml (5½ fl oz) cream

300 g (10 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

400 g (13 oz) unsalted butter

160 g (5½ oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

1 tablespoon instant coffee powder

200 g (6½ oz) hazelnuts, roasted and roughly chopped

16 Ferrero Rocher chocolates (chocolates with a creamy centre and whole hazelnut)

cocoa powder, to dust

Cappuccino truffles

80 ml (2¾ fl oz) cream

250 g (8 oz) dark chocolate, finely chopped

3 teaspoons Kahlua

2 teaspoons instant coffee powder

200 g (6½ oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

Coffee buttercream

To make the coffee buttercream, put the cream and chocolate in a small heatproof bowl. Bring a small pan of water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the bottom of the bowl sit in the water). Stir over the hot water until melted. Beat the butter until light and creamy, then gradually beat in the sugar until thick and white. Beat in the cooled melted chocolate until thick and fluffy. Dissolve the instant coffee in 1 tablespoon of hot water, allow to cool, then beat into the buttercream.

Assembling the cake

Cut the domes off the tops of the cakes to give level surfaces. Put one cake on a serving plate or board. Spread with a quarter of the coffee buttercream and sandwich with the other cake. Cover with the remaining buttercream. Press the hazelnuts onto the side of the cake.

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Beat in the cream and melted chocolate until the mixture is thick and fluffy.

Cover the cake with buttercream and stick the roasted hazelnuts to the sides.

Roll rounded teaspoons of truffle mixture into balls and place on the tray.

Use a fork and a spoon to coat the truffles in melted chocolate.

Cappuccino truffles

To make the cappuccino truffles, bring the cream to the boil in a small pan, then remove from the heat. Add the dark chocolate and stir until melted. Stir in the Kahlua and coffee powder. Transfer to a small bowl, cover and refrigerate until cold and thick.

Roll rounded teaspoons of the mixture into balls (you should be able to make 25 truffles). Place on a baking tray lined with baking paper and chill until firm. If the mixture is too soft to roll, drop rounded teaspoons of mixture onto the tray and refrigerate for 15 minutes to firm up before rolling into balls.

Melt the chocolate buttons in a heatproof bowl, cool slightly, then use a fork and spoon to dip and coat the truffles in the chocolate. Place on a clean piece of baking paper and refrigerate for about 15 minutes to set the chocolate.

Finishing touches

Pile the truffles and chocolates on top of the cake, using any remaining melted chocolate to hold them in place. Dust with cocoa powder.

Note The truffles can be made up to a week in advance and stored in an airtight container in the fridge. The cake can be assembled up to three days in advance and kept in an airtight container in the fridge—let it come back to room temperature before serving.

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Cherry
and coconut millefeuille

A millefeuille is a traditional French pastry, meaning 'thousand leaves' and referring to the many buttery layers of puff pastry. We've adapted the idea to use layers of coconut cake and pastry, with black cherries and a creamy filling. For a neat finish, use an electric knife to trim the edges of the cake. If you don't have one, you will need to use a large serrated knife. Use the same knife for cutting the cake when you are ready to serve it.

22 cm (9 inch) square coconut cake

2 sheets ready-rolled puff pastry

1.25 litres (40 fl oz) thick (double/ heavy) cream

125 ml (4 fl oz) Kirsch

icing (confectioners') sugar

Cherry filling

six 425 g (14 oz) cans stoneless black cherries

40 g (1¼ oz) cornflour (cornstarch)

Millefeuille

Preheat the oven to 210°C (415°F/ Gas 6–7). Place one sheet of the puff pastry on a baking tray lined with non-stick baking paper and prick all over with a fork (this will be easier if the pastry is slightly thawed). Bake the pastry for 10 minutes, or until golden. Repeat with the second sheet of pastry. Leave to cool.

Cherry filling

To make the cherry filling, drain the cherries, keeping 500 ml (16 fl oz) of the syrup. Mix a little of the syrup with the cornflour to make a smooth paste. Put the remaining syrup and cherries in a large pan and add the cornflour paste. Cook over medium heat, stirring until the mixture boils and thickens. Pour the cherry mixture onto a large tray or dish and set aside to cool completely, stirring occasionally.

Assembling the cake

Whisk the cream gently until lightly whipped. Use a large serrated knife to slice the cake into three layers. Place one sheet of cooked pastry on a board and spread with a third of the cherry mixture. Top with one layer of cake, brush the cake with some Kirsch and top with a third of the cream. Repeat these layers twice more and top with the remaining sheet of pastry. Use an electric knife or a large serrated knife to trim the edges of the layered cake so they are even. Carefully transfer the cake to a serving plate or cake board.

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Spread one-third of the cherry filling over the first sheet of puff pastry and then top with a layer of cake.

An electric knife is ideal for trimming the edges of the cake. If you don't have one, use a large serrated knife.

Hold the end of the skewer with a tea towel and drag it over the icing sugar. The sugar will caramelize and create a dark line.

Crisscross topping

Dust the top of the cake heavily with icing sugar. Hold the end of a thick metal skewer with a tea towel and heat over a flame until red hot. Press the skewer over the icing sugar to caramelize the top in a crisscross pattern—you will need to reheat the skewer several times, wiping off any icing sugar.

Note This cake is best made a few hours in advance to give the layers time to settle. Dust with sugar and pattern the top with the skewer close to serving time.

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Peach and orange mousse cake

We've used beautiful fresh peaches for this cake but you could use other stone fruits that are in season, or even well-drained canned fruit. Fruit cakes aren't suitable for this recipe. You can buy the clear plastic (shiny contact) for making the collar from art or cake decorating shops. Allow plenty of time for the topping to set before you plan to serve the cake.

20 cm (8 inch) round cake

White chocolate mousse

150 g (5 oz) white chocolate, chopped

150 g (5 oz) cream cheese

60 g (2 oz) caster (superfine) sugar

80 ml (2¾ fl oz) orange juice

3 teaspoons gelatine

300 ml (10 fl oz) cream, whipped

2 egg whites, whipped to soft peaks

Orange topping

125 ml (4 fl oz) fresh orange juice, strained

1 tablespoon caster (superfine) sugar

¾ teaspoon gelatine

1 large peach, cut into wedges

Equipment

deep 20 cm (8 inch) springform tin

clear plastic (shiny contact)

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Pull the clear plastic tight and fix in position, so that the mousse will set in line with the cake.

Fold the softly whipped egg whites into the mousse mixture with a large metal spoon, keeping in as much air as possible.

Arrange the peach slices on top of the mousse and then pour the orange topping over them. Leave to set before carefully removing the plastic collar.

Preparing the cake

Slice the cake in half horizontally. Lightly grease a deep 20 cm (8 inch) springform tin. Cut a piece of clear plastic about 2 cm (3/4 inch) higher than the tin and wrap around the inside of the tin as a collar. Put half of the cake in the tin (you won't need the other half, so freeze for next time or make truffles). Pull the plastic tight and secure with a paper clip and tape.

White chocolate mousse

To make the white chocolate mousse, bring a pan with a little water to a simmer, then remove from the heat. Place the chocolate in a heatproof bowl, then place the bowl over the pan. Don't let the bowl sit in the water. Stir the chocolate until melted. Beat the cream cheese and sugar until smooth and creamy, then beat in the cooled melted chocolate. Heat the orange juice in a small pan and remove from the heat. Sprinkle with the gelatine and stir until dissolved. Cool slightly before beating into the cream cheese mixture. Fold in the cream, then the softly whipped egg whites. Pour the mousse over the cake base and gently tap the tin on the bench to level the surface. Chill for several hours or until firm.

Orange topping

To make the topping, put the orange juice and sugar in a small pan. Stir over low heat until the sugar has dissolved. Sprinkle with the gelatine and continue stirring until it has dissolved. Remove from the heat and leave to cool. Arrange the sliced peach on top of the mousse. Carefully pour the topping over the cake. Refrigerate for several hours, or until the topping has completely set, before removing the cake from the tin. Carefully pull away the plastic.

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Sweet fig
and chocolate cake

This glamorously understated cake is perfect for a sophisticated occasion where style and taste are the most important items on the menu. Use any cake except a fruit cake—the combination of flavours would not be good.

20 cm (8 inch) round cake

Buttercream

250 g (8 oz) butter

125 g (4 oz) icing (confectioners') sugar, sifted

1 teaspoon vanilla essence

2 teaspoons milk

Kirsch or other fruit-based liqueur

4 tablespoons raspberry jam

300 g (10 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

5 fresh figs, quartered

Buttercream

To make the buttercream, beat the butter with electric beaters until light and creamy. Gradually add the icing sugar alternately with the vanilla essence and the milk, beating until the mixture is smooth and fluffy.

Layering the cake

Use a serrated knife to slice the cake horizontally into three even layers. Place the bottom layer on a board or plate. Brush with a little liqueur and spread with half the jam. Spread with a thin layer of buttercream. Place another cake layer on top and repeat the layers. Top with the remaining cake layer, and spread the rest of the buttercream evenly over the cake.

White chocolate edging

Put the white chocolate buttons in a heatproof bowl. Bring a small pan of water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the bottom of the bowl sit in the water). Stir the chocolate until melted and smooth. (Alternatively, melt the chocolate in the microwave for 1 minute on high, stirring after 30 seconds.)

Slice the cake into three layers and sandwich together with liqueur, jam and buttercream.

Spread the melted white chocolate in strips over a piece of non-stick baking paper and leave to dry.

Break the end off each strip of chocolate so that it has a flat base to stand on.

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Spread the melted chocolate in 5 x 11 cm (2 x 5 inch) strips over a sheet of non-stick baking paper. Leave to set completely before removing from the paper—you will need about 20 of these shapes but make a few extra in case of breakages. Break one end of each strip or trim with a knife to give a flat base, then stand them upright around the edge of the cake, slightly overlapping. You can tie a ribbon around the cake or leave it plain. Arrange the fresh fig quarters around the edge of the cake.

Note This cake can be decorated up to two days in advance, but add the figs just before serving. Keep in a cool dark place in an airtight container or in the fridge in warm weather.

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Marble
glazed cake

The secret to a good marbled finish is not to mix your icings together too thoroughly. Simply spoon them over the cake, then swirl together gently with a skewer. Use any cake for this recipe except a fruit cake, which wouldn't combine well with the chocolate buttercream.

two 20 cm (8 inch) round cakes

White chocolate buttercream

4 tablespoons cream

150 g (5 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

200 g (6½ oz) unsalted butter, chopped

80 g (2¾ oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

80 g (2¾ oz) milk chocolate, chopped

120 ml (4 fl oz) cream

80 g (2¾ oz) dark chocolate, chopped

80 g (2¾ oz) white chocolate, chopped

200 g (6½ oz) flaked almonds, toasted

White chocolate buttercream

To make the white chocolate buttercream, put the cream and chocolate in a small heatproof bowl. Bring a small pan of water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the bottom of the bowl sit in the water). Stir the chocolate over the hot water until melted, then remove from the heat and leave to cool. Beat the butter until light and creamy, then gradually beat in the icing sugar until thick and white. Beat in the melted chocolate until the mixture is thick and fluffy.

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Stand the cake on a rack over a tray and build up the layers of cake and buttercream to make one very high cake.

Make the three chocolate toppings separately and then dollop randomly over the top of the cake.

Gently swirl together the different chocolates with a skewer, not blending them too much.

Layering the cake

Trim away the domed tops from the cakes to give a flat surface. Using a serrated knife, cut each cake horizontally into three even layers. Place a layer of cake on a wire rack over a tray and spread with a sixth of the buttercream. Top with another layer of cake, spread that with buttercream and build up the layers, sandwiching the cake and filling. Finish with a layer of cake, cut-side down to give a flat surface (keep the remaining portion of buttercream for covering the side). Refrigerate the cake for 30 minutes to firm the filling, so that the layers don't slide apart.

Chocolate topping

Put the chopped milk chocolate in a small heatproof bowl with 2 tablespoons of the cream. Bring a small pan of water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the bottom of the bowl sit in the water). Stir the chocolate and cream over the hot water until melted and blended. (Alternatively, melt the mixture in the microwave for 1 minute on High, stirring after 30 seconds.) Do the same with the dark chocolate and white chocolate, blending each with 2 tablespoons of the cream so you have three separate chocolate mixtures.

Marbling the chocolate

Spoon dollops of each chocolate mixture randomly over the top of the cake and then swirl them together with the thick end of a skewer to create a marbling effect. Gently tap the tray on the bench to level the icing. Leave to set, then remove any drips of icing from down the side of the cake.

Finishing touches

Spread the remaining buttercream around the side of the cake. Roughly crush the flaked almonds and press them over the buttercream. Transfer the cake to a serving plate.

Note This cake can be stored in the fridge for up to three days after decorating. Bring to room temperature before serving.

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Striped
chocolate curls cake

The smooth chocolate collar and creamy white chocolate ganache are topped off by a pile of fairground-striped chocolate curls. Use any of the basic cakes for this recipe, except the fruit cake. If you can't find clear plastic (shiny contact) you can use non-stick baking paper.

20 cm (8 inch) round cake

White chocolate ganache

150 g (5 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

130 g (4½ oz) white chocolate, chopped

125 ml (4 fl oz) cream

250 g (8 oz) unsalted butter

Striped curls

150 g (5 oz) dark chocolate buttons (melts)

150 g (5 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

Chocolate collar

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate, chopped

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate buttons (melts)

Equipment

cake decorating comb

clear plastic (shiny contact)

White chocolate ganache

To make the ganache, put all the ingredients in a pan. Stir over low heat until melted and smooth. Transfer to a small bowl, cover the surface with plastic wrap and cool. Beat for 3–5 minutes, or until thick, pale and creamy.

Striped curls

To make the curls, put the dark chocolate buttons in a heatproof bowl. Bring a pan containing a little water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the base of the bowl sit in the water). Stir until the chocolate has melted. Quickly spread the chocolate fairly thinly over a marble board. Drag a cake decorating comb or a fork through the chocolate. Set at room temperature unless very warm.

Melt the white chocolate buttons and spread over the dark chocolate. Spread firmly to fill all the gaps. Leave until just set.

Using the edge of a sharp knife at a 45° angle, scrape over the top of the chocolate. The strips will curl as they come away—don't press too hard. If the chocolate is too firm, the curls will break: leave in a warm place and try again.

Layering the cake

Cut the domed top off the cake to give a flat surface. Slice the cake horizontally into three even layers. Sandwich the layers together with the white chocolate ganache, leaving enough to spread thinly over the top and side.

Chocolate collar

To make the collar, measure the height of the cake and add 5 mm (¼ inch). Cut a strip of plastic this wide and long enough to wrap around the cake with a small overlap. Melt all the chocolate and spread thinly and evenly over the shiny side of the plastic. Let it set a little, but you need to be able to bend the plastic without the chocolate cracking. Work quickly: wrap the plastic around

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Drag the cake decorating comb through the chocolate. If you don't have a comb, use a fork.

Spread the white chocolate firmly, so that it fills in the gaps in the dark chocolate.

Use the edge of a sharp knife held at an angle to scrape the curls from the chocolate.

Wrap the collar around the cake with the chocolate on the inside. Leave to set.

the cake with the chocolate on the inside. Seal the ends and leave until completely set. Peel away the plastic and pile up the chocolate curls in the centre of the cake.

Notes The curls can be stored in an airtight container for up to four days. Don't put them on the cake until you are ready to serve. The cake can be covered a day in advance—keep in the fridge in warm weather, but return to room temperature before serving.
A 'comb' is a flat plastic tool with teeth on each end. Combs are available from speciality kitchen or cake decorating shops.

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Summer
fruits cake

Prettily pleated with a collar of white chocolate sugarpaste and piled high with soft fruits, this special-occasion cake makes a gorgeous centrepiece. Use whatever fruit is in season and make the white chocolate leaves following the instructions on page 108.

two 22 cm (9 inch) round classic sponge cakes

315 ml (10 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream

150 g (5 oz) strawberry yoghurt

310 g (10 oz) white chocolate sugarpaste

icing (confectioners') sugar

500 g (1 lb) strawberries

185 g (6 oz) redcurrants

5 teaspoons redcurrant jelly

8 white chocolate leaves

Equipment

large pastry brush

Strawberry cream

Put the cream in a large bowl with the strawberry yoghurt, and whip until soft peaks form.

Assembling the cake

Place one of the cakes on a large serving plate. Spread with a third of the strawberry cream filling and cover with the second cake. Using a palette knife, cover the top and side of the cake with the remaining strawberry cream.

Sugarpaste pleats

Divide the sugarpaste into six pieces. Roll out one piece on a surface dusted with icing sugar and cut into a strip slightly deeper than the cake and about 20 cm (8 inches) long. Gently pleat the strip into loose folds and position it around the side of the cake. Cut, shape and position more strips of sugarpaste until the side of the cake is completely covered.

Finishing touches

Hull the strawberries and halve any large ones. Arrange over the top of the cake, then fill in the gaps with the redcurrants.

Melt the redcurrant jelly with 2 tablespoons water in a small saucepan. Cool slightly, then use a large pastry brush to brush the glaze over the fruits to make them shine. Finish by decorating with white chocolate leaves. Store the cake in a cool place and serve within 2–3 hours.

Note The cake, with cream and chocolate pleating, can be assembled up to a day in advance, but add the fruits and glaze no more than 2–3 hours before serving.

Cut the chocolate sugarpaste into strips as high as the cake. Gently pleat the paste into loose folds and position around the cake.

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Devil's food cake

Dark chocolate, white chocolate and whipped cream... this is an ultra 'wicked' cake for a special occasion or for sheer indulgence at teatime. It's easy to make, with a little bit of piping that doesn't need to be perfect.

165 g (5½ oz) plain (all-purpose) flour

90 g (3 oz) cocoa powder

1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

250 g (8 oz) caster (superfine) sugar

2 eggs, lightly beaten

250 ml (8 fl oz) buttermilk

1 teaspoon vanilla essence

125 g (4 oz) butter, softened

Chocolate icing

60 g (2 oz) unsalted butter

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate

125 ml (4 fl oz) thick (double/heavy) cream, whipped

60 g (2 oz) white chocolate, chopped

4 dark chocolate discs

cocoa powder

Equipment

20 cm (8 inch) round cake tin

Baking the cake

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). Brush a 20 cm (8 inch) round cake tin with melted butter or oil and line the base and side with non-stick baking paper. Sift the flour, cocoa and soda into a large bowl. Add the sugar. Pour the combined eggs, buttermilk, vanilla essence and butter onto the dry ingredients. Using electric beaters, beat on low speed for 3 minutes or until just moistened.

Beat the mixture on high speed for 5 minutes or until free of lumps and increased in volume. Pour the mixture into the tin and smooth the surface. Bake for 40–50 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean. Leave the cake in the tin for 15 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool completely.

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Beat the cake mixture with electric beaters on low speed for 3 minutes, or until the ingredients are just moistened.

Drag a skewer through the white chocolate circles, from the centre of the cake to the outside edge.

Chocolate icing

To make the chocolate icing, combine the butter and dark chocolate in a small pan. Stir over low heat until melted and smooth, then remove from the heat and leave to cool.

Assembling the cake

Trim the dome from the cake top to level the surface. Slice the cake in half horizontally, spread the bottom layer with the whipped cream and then sandwich the cake back together. Spread the chocolate icing over the top with a palette knife.

Piping the white chocolate

Place the white chocolate in a small heatproof bowl and place over a pan of barely simmering water until melted. Remove from the heat and leave to cool slightly. Spoon the melted chocolate into a small paper piping bag. Snip off the tip and pipe a small circle in the centre of the cake. Pipe another circle around it and then carry on until you have covered the top of the cake (you will probably pipe about seven circles). Before the chocolate sets, drag a skewer from the centre circle to the outside of the cake. Clean the skewer and repeat this process, making the lines evenly spaced and working around the cake like the hands of a clock.

Finishing touches

Lightly dust the chocolate discs with cocoa and arrange in the centre of the cake.

Note Store the cake for three days unfilled in an airtight container or for up to three months in the freezer, unfilled and un-iced. The filled cake is best assembled and eaten on the same day.

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Custard
meringue gateau

The meringue ovals, moulded between two spoons, are called 'quenelles'. Here they've been cleverly used to create a deliciously soft marshmallow border. Make sure you keep the spoons wet while making the quenelles, so the meringue doesn't stick.

two 22 cm (9 inch) round classic sponge cakes

75 g (2½ oz) caster (superfine) sugar

300 g (10 oz) raspberries, plus extra to decorate

90 g (3 oz) flaked almonds, toasted

2 tablespoons apricot jam

icing (confectioners') sugar

Custard filling

2 tablespoons custard powder

2 tablespoons cornflour (cornstarch)

55 g (1¾ oz) caster (superfine) sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla essence

500 ml (16 fl oz) milk

2 eggs, beaten

Meringue topping

4 egg whites

250 g (8 oz) caster (superfine) sugar

Sugar syrup

Combine the sugar and 160 ml (5½ fl oz) water in a small pan and stir over medium heat until the sugar has dissolved, then simmer for 2 minutes. Allow to cool.

Custard filling

To make the custard filling, blend the custard powder, cornflour, sugar and vanilla in a pan with a little of the milk to make a smooth paste. Stir in the remaining milk and the eggs and mix together well. Stir over the heat until the mixture boils and thickens. Pour into a large bowl and cover the surface with plastic wrap to prevent a skin forming. Stir occasionally to cool the custard.

Layering the cake

Use a serrated knife to slice each sponge in half horizontally. Place one layer of sponge on a baking tray lined with non-stick baking paper. Brush liberally with the cooled sugar syrup. Beat the custard with a wooden spoon to soften slightly. Spread a third of the custard over the cake, scatter with a third of the raspberries, then top with more cake. Build up the layers, finishing with a layer of cake. Cover and chill the cake for at least 1 hour.

Meringue topping

Preheat the oven to 250°C (500°F/Gas 10). Beat the egg whites in a small bowl until stiff peaks form. Gradually add the sugar, beating well after each addition until the sugar has dissolved. Spread a thin layer of meringue over the top and side of the cake. Press almonds over the side of the cake.

Meringue quenelles

Using two dessertspoons, make small ovals from the remaining meringue by dipping the spoons quickly into water, then scooping up a small amount of meringue. Use the second spoon to scoop the meringue from the first spoon, making an oval. Scoop the quenelle gently off the spoon onto the cake. Continue until you have worked your way around the cake.

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Make the quenelles ***by moulding*** *the meringue between* ***two wet*** *dessertspoons.*

Scoop the quenelle ***off the spoon*** *and arrange* ***around the edge of*** *the cake, facing* ***the centre.***

Brush the meringue ***quenelles with the strained apricot jam after they have been baked.***

Bake for 2–3 minutes, or until the meringue is just brown on the edges. You may need to rotate the cake halfway through cooking to ensure even browning.

Finishing touches

Transfer the cake to a serving plate. Heat the apricot jam in a small pan, push through a strainer and gently brush over the meringue ovals. Fill the centre of the cake with fresh raspberries and dust with icing sugar.

Note The cake can be stored in the fridge for up to two days without the meringue topping. Top with the meringue on the day of serving.

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Spotted collar cake

The chocolate collar is what makes this cake so spectacular... once you have perfected the technique, you can use it to make even more elaborately patterned collars for cakes and cheesecakes. If you can't find clear plastic (shiny contact) or acetate you can use non-stick baking paper.

25 cm (10 inch) oval cake

Coffee buttercream

2 tablespoons cream

75 g (2½ oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

100 g (3½ oz) unsalted butter, softened

40 g (1½ oz) icing (confectioners') sugar

1 teaspoon instant coffee powder

Spotted collar

30 g (1 oz) white chocolate buttons (melts)

30 g (1 oz) milk chocolate buttons (melts)

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate buttons (melts)

60 g (2 oz) dark chocolate, chopped

cocoa powder

Equipment

clear plastic (shiny contact)

Preparing the cake

Cut the dome off the top of the cake to level the surface. Turn the cake upside down on a plate or board so that the flat base becomes the top. Measure the height of the cake. Cut a strip of clear plastic this wide, and long enough to wrap around the cake.

Coffee buttercream

To make the coffee buttercream, put the cream and white chocolate buttons in a small heatproof bowl. Bring a small pan of water to a simmer, remove from the heat and place the bowl over the pan (don't let the bottom of the bowl sit in the water). Stir the chocolate until melted. Beat the butter until light and creamy, then gradually beat in the icing sugar until thick and white. Beat in the cooled melted chocolate mixture until thick and fluffy. Dissolve the coffee powder in 1 teaspoon of hot water and beat into the buttercream.

Cut the plastic to the same height as the cake and long enough to wrap around it.

Pipe the melted milk and white chocolate in dots on the shiny side of the plastic.

Melt the dark chocolate and spread over the plastic strip, over the dots.

Wrap the collar around the cake with the chocolate on the inside.

Once the chocolate has set, gently peel away the strip of clear plastic.

Spread the buttercream evenly over the top and side of the cake. In warm weather you could refrigerate the cake for 10–15 minutes after this, to firm the buttercream a little.

Spotted collar

To make the spotted collar, melt the white and milk chocolate buttons in separate heatproof bowls. Alternatively, melt in the microwave for 1 minute on high, stirring after 30 seconds. Spoon into separate paper piping bags. Pipe large and small dots of chocolate over the shiny side of the plastic. Gently tap the plastic on the bench to flatten the dots and then leave them to set.

Melt the dark chocolate buttons and dark chocolate together, then cool slightly. Working quickly, spread evenly over the entire strip of plastic, over the top of the dots. Be careful not to press too hard or the dots may lift off the surface. Leave to set a little, but you need to be able to bend the strip without it cracking. Quickly wrap the strip around the cake with the chocolate on the inside. Seal the ends of the plastic and leave until set (in the fridge in warm weather). Peel the plastic from the collar and dust the cake with cocoa powder.

Note You can decorate the cake and keep it in the fridge for several hours before serving. Don't attempt the chocolate collar on a very hot day—you may find it too soft to work with. Clear plastic is available from art or cake decorating shops.

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Pears
with a spun toffee halo

Choose the smallest pears you can find to make this delightful and whimsical creation, so they just poke out of the pecan-covered cake. Spinning the toffee can be a daunting job for beginners to decorating and needs a little care.

1 quantity Madeira cake mixture for 20 cm (8 inch) round cake

1 cinnamon stick

2 strips lemon rind

1 tablespoon lemon juice

440 g (14 oz) caster (superfine) sugar

6 beurre bosc or packham pears

3 tablespoons apricot jam

2 tablespoons chopped pecans

Equipment

two 23 cm (9 inch) springform tins

wide gold ribbon

Poaching the pears

Put the cinnamon, lemon rind, lemon juice, 1 litre (32 fl oz) water and half the sugar in a pan large enough to hold the pears. Stir over heat until the sugar has dissolved. Core the pears through the bases with a melon baller, then peel and place in the syrup. Simmer, partly covered, for 10 minutes, or until tender. Remove from the heat and leave to cool in the syrup. Drain thoroughly on paper towels.

Baking the cake

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). Lightly grease the springform tins and line the bases with non-stick baking paper. Divide the cake mixture between the tins. Arrange the pears around the edge of one cake, about 2.5 cm (1 inch) in from the edge, and gently press into the mixture. Bake for 40 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the plain cake comes out clean. Cook the pear cake for a further 40 minutes, or until a skewer comes out clean. Leave the cakes in their tins for 5 minutes, then remove from the tins and cool on wire racks.

Assembling the cake

Trim the dome from the top of the plain cake to give a level surface. Warm and strain the jam and spread some over the plain cake. Sit the pear cake on top and brush with a little jam. Sprinkle with the pecans.

Spun toffee

Place a couple of sheets of newspaper on the floor. Place a wooden spoon on the work surface with its handle over the edge, above the newspaper (weigh it down with a heavy object). Lightly oil the spoon handle. Put a heavy-based pan over medium heat, gradually sprinkle with some of the remaining sugar and, as it melts, sprinkle with the rest. Stir to melt any lumps and prevent the toffee from burning. Meanwhile, run a little cold water into the sink. When the toffee is golden brown, remove the pan from the

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Arrange the poached pears around the edge of the cake mixture in one of the tins.

As the sugar in the pan melts, sprinkle with more sugar. Stir to melt any lumps that form.

Carefully flick the toffee backwards and forwards over the handle of the wooden spoon.

Lift the spun toffee off the spoon and mould into a halo shape.

heat and place the base in the water to quickly cool the toffee and prevent it burning. This will also make the toffee thicken.

Hold two forks back to back and dip in the hot toffee. Carefully flick the toffee backwards and forwards over the handle of the spoon, re-dipping in the pan as often as necessary. If the toffee gets too thick, warm it slightly over low heat. Lift the toffee off the handle and mould into a large halo shape, the same width as the top of the pears. Make more halos to place over the pears. Trim the cake with ribbon to hide the join.

Note Best eaten on the day of baking. The toffee can be kept in an airtight container for several hours, but don't place on the cake until serving or it will soften.

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Children's cakes

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Patch
the puppy

Buttercream is an easy icing for beginners—any mistakes can be quickly smoothed over. This cake uses a small amount of sugarpaste for making the puppy's eyes—the quantity is so tiny that it's easier to buy a small packet than make your own. Use any cake except a fruit cake.

1 quantity cake mixture for 15 cm (6 inch) round cake

1 tablespoon cocoa powder, sifted

500 g (1 lb) buttercream

60 g (2 oz) sugarpaste

black paste food colouring

3 liquorice 'laces'

1 gold foil-covered chocolate coin

Equipment

3.5 litre (112 fl oz) ovenproof mixing bowl

30 cm (12 inch) round gold cake board

fine paintbrush

narrow tartan ribbon

Baking the cake

Preheat the oven to 160°C (315°F/Gas 2–3). Grease the base of the mixing bowl and line with a circle of non-stick baking paper. Spoon the cake mixture into the bowl and level the surface. Bake for about 40 minutes or until firm. Turn out onto a wire rack and leave to cool.

Covering the cake

Trim the domed top off the cake and turn the cake upside down to give a flat surface. Beat the cocoa into a third of the buttercream.

Reserve 3 tablespoons of the plain buttercream, then spread the remainder of the buttercream over the cake, covering it as smoothly as possible. Spread a little buttercream on the board at the bottom of the cake and build it up to form a 'neck'. Gently fluff up the surface of the buttercream with a cocktail stick.

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Spread chocolate buttercream down each side of the puppy's face, widening at the base to make into ears.

Spoon the reserved plain buttercream onto the cake in a mound just below the centre and spread it into a snout shape. Dampen a palette knife and smooth down the snout area to contrast with the fluffed-up surface of the rest of the buttercream.

Nose, eyes and mouth

Spread a little of the chocolate buttercream over one eye area of the cake. Shape two white eyes from the sugarpaste and position on the cake, placing one over the area of chocolate buttercream.

Colour a small piece of sugarpaste black and shape it into a nose. Press gently into position.

Arrange pieces of liquorice 'lace' around the eyes, pressing them gently into the buttercream. Form a smiling mouth from a little more liquorice.

Ears

Spread small spoonfuls of the chocolate buttercream down each side of the dog's face. Flatten with a palette knife, widening at the base to shape ears. Fluff up lightly with a cocktail stick. Secure more liquorice around the ears to outline.

Finishing touches

Paint the centres of the eyes black with food colouring and a fine paintbrush. Arrange the ribbon around the puppy's neck, securing the gold coin to it with a dot of buttercream.

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Spotty the snake

This colourful snake uses a delicious truffle mixture that children will love. It is easy to mould and is made from cake crumbs that are left over when other cakes are shaped. Keep cake trimmings in bags in the freezer for occasions just like this.

90 g (3 oz) royal icing
brown, pink, yellow, green, black and red food colourings
75 g (2½ oz) light brown sugar
185 g (6 oz) chocolate (see Note)
750 g (1½ lb) cake crumbs
90 g (3 oz) apricot jam
90 ml (3 fl oz) evaporated milk
¾ teaspoon vanilla essence
650 g (1 lb 5 oz) sugarpaste
icing (confectioners') sugar

Equipment

28 cm (11 inch) round cake board
2 small round cutters
narrow pink ribbon

Decorating the board

Colour the royal icing brown with a few drops of food colouring and spread over the cake board. Sprinkle with the brown sugar and leave to dry.

Truffle paste

Bring a pan with a little water to a simmer, then remove from the heat. Place the chocolate in a heatproof bowl, then place the bowl over the pan. Don't let the bowl sit in the water. Stir the chocolate until melted.

Mix together the cake crumbs, apricot jam, evaporated milk and vanilla essence in a bowl, then slowly pour in the melted chocolate, stirring continuously, until a firm paste forms. If the truffle paste is too dry it will crumble and be difficult to mould—add a little more evaporated milk. If it is too soft it will not hold its shape—add a few more cake crumbs.

Shaping the snake

Roll the truffle paste into a sausage shape about 60 cm (24 inches) long. Colour 500 g (1 lb) of the sugarpaste bright pink, then roll out 375 g (12 oz) of it into a long narrow strip on a surface dusted with icing sugar and brush with water. Wrap the sugarpaste around the truffle paste, taking care to seal the join. Arrange the body shape in a coil on the cake board with the join underneath. Shape the head from the remaining pink sugarpaste and attach to the body. Shape the end of the tail to a point.

Spots

Colour 60 g (2 oz) of the remaining sugarpaste yellow and 30 g (1 oz) green. Roll out very thinly and use the small round cutters to make circles of yellow paste and slightly smaller circles of green paste. Attach the yellow circles to the snake with a little water and position a green circle on top of every second one.

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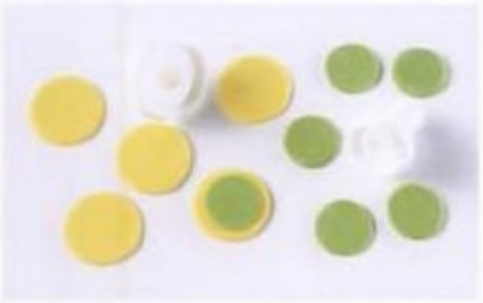
Mould the truffle ***paste into a long*** *sausage and then* ***wrap in the*** *strip of pink* ***sugarpaste, sealing*** *the join.*



Roll out the yellow and green sugarpaste very thinly and then cut circles from each. Attach to the snake with a little water.

Finishing touches

Colour 7 g (1/4 oz) of the remaining sugarpaste black and 7 g (1/4 oz) red. Shape eyes, nose and tongue from black, red and white paste and attach to the snake with a little water. Trim the board with pink ribbon, securing with double-sided tape.

Note Truffle paste can be made from any leftover cake trimmings. If you are using chocolate cake crumbs, bind the mixture with melted milk or dark chocolate. If using Madeira or other light cake crumbs, try using melted white chocolate.

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Bunny cake

A perfect idea for beginners, with simple moulded rabbits and cut-out grass. Use any cake except fruit cake.

20 cm (8 inch) hexagonal cake (use mixture for 20 cm round cake)

7 tablespoons raspberry or strawberry jam

250 g (8 oz) buttercream

1.5 kg (3 lb) sugarpaste

yellow, green and pink paste food colourings

12 ready-made flower cake decorations

Equipment

23 cm (9 inch) round silver cake board

narrow pink ribbon

Secure the grass to the base of the cake with water, letting the cut edge fall away like grass.

Covering the cake

Slice the dome off the top of the cake to give a level surface, then cut the cake in half horizontally. Place one layer on the cake board and spread with 4 tablespoons of the jam. Cover with the buttercream, then position the second layer on top. Sieve the remaining jam to remove any lumps. Brush the cake with the jam.

Colour 1.1 kg (2 lb 4 oz) of the sugarpaste yellow. Cover the cake with the yellow sugarpaste.

Grass

Colour 125 g (4 oz) of the sugarpaste green. Thinly roll out a little and cut out a 13 x 2.5 cm (5 x 1 inch) strip. Make cuts down one long side of the strip, through to the centre. Dampen the uncut edge of the strip with water, then lay it against the base of the cake so that the cut edge falls away from the cake to look like grass. Make more strips and attach all around the base of the cake.

Pink trim

Colour 60 g (2 oz) of the sugarpaste pale pink and roll it out thinly. Cut into 13 x 5 mm (5 x 1/4 inch) strips, reserving the trimmings. Lightly dampen the points around the top edge of the cake with water. Gently twist a pink strip and secure it between two points on top of the cake. Repeat all around the cake. Secure small balls of white sugarpaste at the points where the strips meet.

Bunnies

To shape a simple bunny, start by rolling a piece of white sugarpaste into a ball, about 2.5 cm (1 inch) in diameter, for the body. Add a head, ears and tail. Secure on the centre of the cake. Shape and secure three smaller bunnies. Add small noses and centres of ears from pink icing trimmings.

Finishing touches

Make more grass as before, but cut into 2.5 cm (1 inch) lengths and roll into tufts. Secure the grass and flower decorations to the top of the cake with water. Trim the board with ribbon, securing with double-sided tape.

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Travelling trucks

Simple shapes in bright colours appeal to very young children. This theme works equally well with cars or trains. You could also cut the trucks from several different colours of sugarpaste. Use any flavour round cake except a fruit cake—the flavours don't usually combine well with jam and buttercream fillings.

20 cm (8 inch) round cake

7 tablespoons strawberry or raspberry jam

125 g (4 oz) buttercream

1.5 kg (3 lb) sugarpaste

green, red, brown, blue, black and yellow paste food colourings

Equipment

25 cm (10 inch) round silver cake board

candles

narrow ribbon

Covering the cake

Slice the dome off the top of the cake to give a level surface, then cut the cake in half horizontally. Place one layer of the cake on the cake board and spread with 4 tablespoons of the jam. Cover the cake with the buttercream, then position the second layer on top.

Sieve the remaining jam and brush it over the cake. Cover the cake with 1 kg (2 lb) of the white sugarpaste.

Trucks on cake side

Colour 125 g (4 oz) of the sugarpaste green. Reserve a little, then roll out the remainder to a strip as long as the circumference of the cake. Cut one edge straight and the other in a wavy line. Dampen the bottom edge of the cake with water, then wrap the strip of paste around the base of the cake.

Trace the template (page 154), onto non-stick baking paper and cut it out. Colour 185 g (6 oz) of the sugarpaste red. Thinly roll out half the red sugarpaste. Lay the template on the sugarpaste and cut around it to shape a truck. Dampen with water and secure the truck to the side of the cake above the green strip, leaving room to position the wheels. Make and secure more trucks to the green strip.

Truck on cake top

Shape the remaining red sugarpaste into a solid rectangle. Cut out a wedge from one corner of the rectangle to shape the front of a truck.

Bridge and water

Colour 125 g (4 oz) of the sugarpaste brown. Shape into a thick semi-circle, then cut out the centre with a knife or round cutter to make a bridge. Mark 'bricks' on the side of the bridge.

Colour a little more sugarpaste pale blue. Roll out and position on top of the cake. Carefully arrange the bridge over the blue 'water'. Shape a small path from

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Shape a rectangle of red sugarpaste and then cut off a wedge from one corner to shape a truck. Make wheels from black sugarpaste and attach to the truck with water.

brown trimmings and secure to the top of the cake with a little water. Secure the truck on top of the cake, raising it off the cake slightly on a piece of red sugarpaste trimmings.

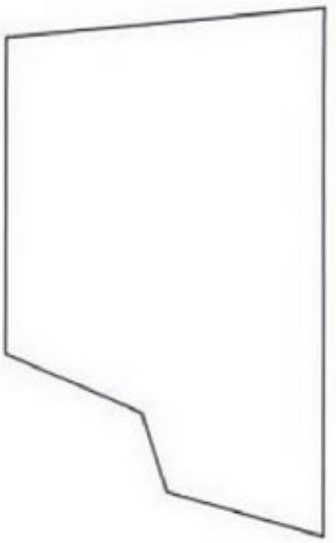
Finishing touches

Colour a little more sugarpaste black and shape it into wheels. Secure wheels to the trucks on the top and side of the cake.

Shape tiny balls of green sugarpaste from trimmings and arrange them in rings on the top of the cake. Press candles into the centres of the rings, or fill them with a dot of red icing. Shape small yellow 'headlights' and secure them to the front of the truck on the top of the cake.

Trim the cake board with narrow ribbon, securing it with double-sided tape.

Note The simple design of this cake is very effective. However, you could add more detail—for instance, windows and number plates on the trucks.



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Purring
pussy cat

For any young child with a cat, this cake is going to be purrrfect. Change the colourings to match a family pet. The trickiest part of this recipe is covering the cake with sugarpaste so, once you've mastered that, it really is simple.

15 cm (6 inch) round cake
20 cm (8 inch) oval cake

315 g (10 oz) jam
470 g (15 oz) buttercream
2.5 kg (5 lb) sugarpaste
green, cream, pink, red and black paste food colourings
90 g (3 oz) royal icing
liquorice 'laces'

Equipment

38 cm (15 inch) oval cake board
paintbrush
narrow brown ribbon

Layering the cake

Cut the domed tops off the round and oval cakes to give a level surface to each. Slice both cakes in half horizontally and sandwich them back together with jam.

Assembling the cake

The oval cake will become the cat's head and the round cake will become its body. To fit the two cakes together, use the oval cake tin as a template to cut around, removing a curved section from one side of the round cake. Then fit the two cakes together neatly, securing with a little buttercream. Cover the whole cake with a thin coat of buttercream.

Covering the board

Colour 560 g (1 lb 2 oz) of the sugarpaste green and use it to cover the board. Leave to dry.

Covering the cake

Reserve 125 g (4 oz) of the sugarpaste and colour the remainder off-white using cream food colouring. Roll out the sugarpaste and cover the cake. Secure the cake to the board with a little royal icing.

Cat features

Colour 25 g (3/4 oz) of the sugarpaste pink, a tiny piece red and the remainder black. Using the off-white coloured trimmings and the other colours, model the cat's eyes, nose, mouth, tail and paws.

Make templates from the outline (page 156), for the inner and outer ears. Roll out the pink sugarpaste and off-white trimmings, then cut out the ears. Attach the pink inner ear to the outer ear with a little water. Leave all these pieces to dry.

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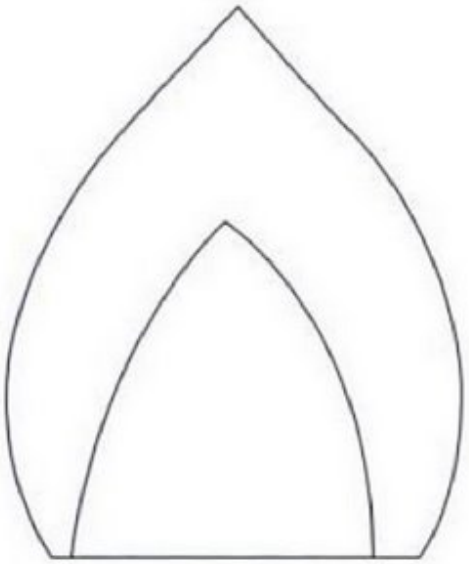

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Using the red, black and off-white sugarpaste, shape the tail, eyes, nose, mouth and paws.

Use the template to cut out the inner and outer ears from pink and off-white sugarpaste. Stick the pieces together with water.

Finishing touches

Using black food colouring with a small amount of royal icing added to thicken, paint on the body markings. Attach all the features, ears and tail and six liquorice whiskers with dabs of royal icing.

Trim the cake board with ribbon, securing it with double-sided tape.

Materia

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First birthday blocks

two 8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cakes

2 quantities buttercream from page 24

assorted food colourings

Equipment

15 x 40 cm (6 x 16 inch) cake board

Shaping the cake

Trim the tops off the cakes to give a level surface. Leave one cake whole. Cut the other cake in half, then slice a small triangle off one of the halves. Place the pieces on the cake board in the shape of a number one—you will not need the middle triangle of the cut cake. Join the edges together with a little buttercream.

Icing the cake

Place 3 tablespoons of the buttercream into four separate small bowls. Tint one portion red, another blue, one portion yellow and the final portion green. Spoon each colour into a small paper piping bag. Leave the largest portion of the icing uncoloured.

Spread the plain buttercream over the entire surface of the cake, including the sides. Spread smoothly with a palette knife. Use a skewer to outline the cubes and mark letters and numbers in the centre of the cubes—we have used random characters but you could use the child's initials.

Pipe over your skewer marks on each cube, alternating the colours of the icing so that each cube is a different colour. Then, carefully fill in the centre of the letters and numbers with the same colour you used for the outline.

Leave one bar cake whole and cut the other one into three pieces.

Move the cake pieces into position to make a number one. You will not need the middle triangle.

Use a skewer to mark the letters and numbers in the centre of the cubes.

Pipe over the skewer marks on the cubes, alternating the colours of the icing.

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Snakes alive!
number two

8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cake

20 cm (8 inch) ring Madeira cake

2 quantities buttercream from page 24

violet and green food colourings

purple sprinkles

2 white jellybeans

2 purple round sweets

1 red jelly snake

Equipment

30 cm (12 inch) square cake board

Shaping the cake

Do not trim the tops of the cakes—leave the cakes rounded to form the shape of a snake. Enlarge and cut out the pieces of the template from page 411 and stick them to the top of the cake with skewers or toothpicks. Cut the cakes to shape, then move the cake pieces into the shape of a snake on the board. Remove the templates and toothpicks and join the pieces together with a little of the plain buttercream.

Icing the cake

Place 2 tablespoons of the buttercream in a small bowl and tint it dark violet, similar to the colour of the sprinkles. Spoon the violet buttercream into a piping bag. Tint the remaining buttercream bright green.

Spread the green buttercream evenly over the entire cake, using a palette knife to smooth the surface. Once the snake has been completely iced with the green buttercream, pipe squiggly patches over the snake with the violet buttercream. Fill inside the patches with the sprinkles.

Decorating the cake

Arrange the jellybeans in place for the eyes, pipe a little violet icing onto each of the jellybeans and stick a purple sweet to the front of it. Pipe a mouth with violet buttercream, then pipe two dots for the nostrils. Make a slit in the head part of the jelly snake for the tip of the tongue and trim so that it is about 2.5 cm (1 inch) long. Insert into the mouth of the cake snake.

Cut out the pieces of template and then secure to the tops of the cakes.

Cut around the templates and then move the pieces of cake into position.

Cover the cake with the green buttercream. Pipe patterns with the violet buttercream.

Fill inside the piped patterns with the purple sprinkles. They will stick to the buttercream.

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see template page 411

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Third bird-day

two 20 cm (8 inch) ring Madeira cakes

1½ quantities buttercream from page 24

red and yellow food colourings

yellow and white jellybeans

banana sweets

1 marshmallow

1 black jellybean

2 orange jelly snakes

Equipment

32 cm (13 inch) square cake board

Shaping the cake

Do not level the cakes—leave them rounded. Cut one cake in half, with one end pointed for the beak. Cut a small piece from the middle of the other cake. Join the cakes in the shape of a number three.

Icing the cake

Tint 3 tablespoons of the buttercream bright orange-red. Tint the remaining buttercream bright yellow. Spread the orange icing over the end of the top cake for the beak. Add a couple more drops of red to the leftover orange beak icing and ice a strip along the bottom of the beak for the opening of the mouth. Ice the rest of the cake with yellow icing. Alternatively, you may prefer to ice all of the cake with the yellow icing first and then go over the beak area with the orange icing.

Decorating the cake

Cut the jellybeans and banana sweets in half lengthways. Leave a small space behind the beak for the eyes, then start laying jellybeans over the icing, cut-side down and slightly overlapping. Stop when you reach the middle point of the three. Stick four rows of bananas in the middle of the cake. Add another four rows or so of jellybeans beneath the bananas, then add another three rows of bananas.

Cut a marshmallow in half to make eyes. Cut the ends off a black jellybean and use a little buttercream to stick them in place. Add plumage by sticking a few bananas at a jaunty angle behind the eyes. Make three slits on the head end of the snakes to create feet and place them on the bottom of the cake as shown. Overlap some bananas on top of the legs to hide the top ends.

Cut one ring cake in half, with one end pointed. Cut a small piece from the middle of the other cake.

Join the piece with the pointed end to the largest piece in the shape of a number three.

Arrange the jellybeans over the icing, cut-side down and slightly overlapping like feathers.

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Race you four it

three 8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cakes

1½ quantities buttercream from page 24

brown food colouring

50 g (1¾ oz) dark chocolate melts (buttons), melted

chocolate sprinkles

1 brown round sweet

1 round mint

1 short liquorice strap

long red fruit straps

2 yellow round sweets

Equipment

32 cm (13 inch) square cake board

Shaping the cake

Cut one cake in half, then cut one of the halves in half again. Cut a slice from one end of another cake, then cut a triangle off each end of the larger piece. Arrange the cake pieces into the shape of a number four on a cake board, levelling the cake if necessary. Join the edges with buttercream.

Icing the cake

Reserve 3 tablespoons of the buttercream. Tint the remaining buttercream caramel brown. Spread the white buttercream down the nose of the horse. Spread brown buttercream over the rest of the horse and blend it neatly into the white icing.

Mark onto the icing the mouth, mane, nostril, and the inside and outside of the ear. Spread white buttercream into the area you have marked for the mouth, then into the centre of the ear. Build up the height of the outer area of the ear with more brown icing.

Decorating the cake

Spoon the melted chocolate into a piping bag, then pipe an outline around the mane, ear and nostril. Fill the mane with chocolate sprinkles and continue it down the side by pressing sprinkles onto the side with a palette knife.

Stick the brown sweet to the mint with a little buttercream and stick onto the face. Cut an eyelash out of liquorice and place above the eye, fanning out the lashes and pressing gently into the cake. Cut strips from the liquorice and line the horse's mouth. Arrange fruit straps in place for reigns and stick yellow sweets on the straps.

Leave one of the cakes whole and cut the others into shaped pieces as shown above.

Arrange the pieces into position to make a number four and then secure together with buttercream.

Spread white buttercream into the centre of the ear and then spread brown icing around it.

Continue the mane down the side of the cake by pressing sprinkles onto the side with a palette knife.

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Five
down on the farm

8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cake

20 cm (8 inch) Madeira ring cake

1½ quantities buttercream from page 24

caramel and green food colourings

blue piping gel

100 g (3½ oz) dark or milk chocolate melts (buttons)

Equipment

25 x 50 cm (10 x 20 inch) cake board

plastic farm animals

Shaping the cake

Cut the bar cake in half. Cut a piece from the ring cake that is almost a quarter of the ring. Next, square off this piece by neatly cutting off the rounded edges. Arrange the pieces on the cake board in the shape of a five, using the smaller offcuts to lengthen the bar of the number. Join the edges together with a little buttercream.

Icing the cake

Place 185 ml (6 fl oz) of the buttercream in a small bowl and tint it light brown for the ground cover. Tint the remaining buttercream light green for the grass.

Mark out three sections for the paddocks and spread green buttercream over the top and bottom sections and brown over the middle section. Make a pond by piping blue piping gel onto one of the green paddocks.

Decorating the cake

Place the chocolate in a heatproof bowl. Bring a saucepan of water to the boil, then remove from the heat. Sit the bowl over the pan, making sure the base of the bowl does not sit in the water. Stir occasionally until melted. Spoon the chocolate into a piping bag and create a mud bath for the pigs by piping some of the chocolate into the middle paddock.

Pipe the remaining chocolate onto a sheet of non-stick baking paper that has been placed on an oiled baking tray. Pipe about 30 fences 2.5 cm (1 inch) high and 5 cm (2 inches) wide (this will allow for any breakages). When set, carefully stick around the edge of the cake. Decorate the cake with the farm animals.

Cut the bar cake in half. Cut a piece from the ring cake that is almost a quarter of the ring.

Square off the rounded edges from the side and top of the removed piece of ring cake.

Arrange the pieces in the shape of a number five and join together with a little buttercream.

Pipe about 30 chocolate fences onto non-stick baking paper and then peel off when dry.

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Under
the sea at six

8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cake

20 cm (8 inch) Madeira ring cake

1½ quantities buttercream from page 24

caramel and blue food colourings

green and red fruit straps

brown round sweets

liquorice allsorts

rainbow chocolate chips

assorted fish-shaped sweets

goldfish crackers

assorted coloured piping gels

Equipment

25 x 45 cm (10 x 18 inch) cake board

small star cutter

Shaping the cake

Leave the ring cake whole and cut the top and bottom from the bar cake as shown. Arrange the cakes on the board in the figure six, joining with a little buttercream and discarding the offcuts. Trim to neaten the edges and the top of the cake.

Icing the cake

Reserve 3 tablespoons of the plain buttercream in a small bowl. Place a further 6 tablespoons of plain buttercream in another small bowl and tint it caramel to resemble sand. Tint the remaining buttercream blue.

Spread sand-coloured buttercream over the bottom of the six and cover the rest of the cake with the blue buttercream. Spread some of the white buttercream at the top to resemble a wave—use a palette knife to rough it up so that it looks more realistic.

Decorating the cake

Cut the fruit straps into various lengths, then twist the strips a few times to look like seaweed strands. Stick the 'seaweed' onto the cake, inserting it into the sand-coloured buttercream. Place brown sweets at the base.

Cut the coloured section away from the liquorice allsorts and, using a small star cutter or small sharp knife, cut star shapes from them. Place the 'starfish' on the sand. Sprinkle rainbow chocolate chips onto the sand. Arrange fish-shaped sweets and crackers and use the piping gel or coloured buttercream to make patterns on the fish.

Cut a sharp curve in the bottom of the bar cake and a soft curve in the top. Discard the pieces.

Join the remaining bar cake to the ring cake with a little buttercream to make a number six.

Cut green and red fruit straps into lengths and then twist them to look like strands of seaweed.

Cut away the coloured sections from the liquorice allsorts and, using a star cutter, make them into starfish.

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Seventh heaven

two 8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cakes

1½ quantities buttercream from page 24

blue and green food colourings

2 teaspoons cocoa powder

150 g (5 oz) green mint leaves

2 flaky chocolate bars

banana sweets

toy monkeys or monkey sweets

Equipment

32 cm (13 inch) square cake board

Shaping the cake

Trim the cakes as shown so that the top bar cake has three corners cut off (but not the corner that will join the bottom cake), and the second cake has a diagonal strip cut off one side and the corners cut off the other side. Arrange the pieces on the cake board in a figure seven, joining the edges with a little of the buttercream.

Icing the cake

Place 3 tablespoons of the buttercream in a small bowl and tint blue for the sky. Divide the remaining buttercream in half. Tint one half green, and add the cocoa to the other half and mix together to create a deep brown.

Spread a 5 cm (2 inch) strip of blue buttercream at each end of the top of the seven and fill in the space with green buttercream. Then, cover the trunk with the brown buttercream.

Decorating the cake

Cut the mint leaves in half horizontally with sharp scissors and overlap on the green buttercream with a few edging over the blue buttercream—it looks best to have the leaves mainly sugar-side up, but with occasional ones shiny-side up. Break the chocolate bars into flakes and sprinkle over the trunk of the tree, pressing down lightly into the buttercream so that they stay in place. Arrange assorted bananas in a bunch just below the leaves. Arrange the monkeys in the tree.

Trim the cakes so that the top bar cake has three corners cut off, but not the one that will be at the join.

Arrange the pieces on the board in a figure seven, joining the edges with a little buttercream.

Spread blue buttercream at the top corners for sky and green in the middle where the leaves will go.

Cut the mint leaves in half with sharp scissors and overlap on the green buttercream.

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Racing
at eight

two 20 cm (8 inch) Madeira ring cakes

2 quantities buttercream from page 24

green food colouring

two 1 metre (about 1 yard) liquorice straps

red liquorice laces

tiny bear biscuits

jelly babies

chocolate or toy cars

flags or liquorice allsorts and toothpicks

Equipment

30 x 50 cm (12 x 20 inch) cake board

Shaping the cake

Cut a small slice off each cake as shown so that they will sit flat against each other. Arrange the cakes on the cake board in the figure eight, joining the edges with a little buttercream. Trim to neaten the edges and the top of the cake.

Icing the cake

Tint the buttercream green, then spread evenly over the cake.

Decorating the cake

Use black liquorice to mark out the lanes of the track and add a strip across the finish line. Cut the red liquorice into short strips about 2.5 cm (1 inch) long (you will need about 45). Place the red strips in a line running down the centre of each lane. Place bear biscuits and jelly babies at the edges of the track for the cheering crowd. Place cars on the track and insert flags (paper or made from toothpicks and liquorice allsort slices) at the finish line and other points around the track.

Cut a small slice from the side of each cake so that they can sit flat against each other.

Arrange the cakes together on the board and join the edge where they meet with a little buttercream.

Use the straps of black liquorice to mark out the lines of the track and the finishing line.

Cut the red liquorice into short strips and place in a line down the centre of each lane.

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Lift off
at nine

20 cm (8 inch) Madeira ring cake

8 x 25 cm (3 x 10 inch) Madeira cake

2 quantities buttercream from page 24

black and blue paste food colourings

500 g (1 lb) sugarpaste

1 ice-cream cone

silver dragees

twinkle sprinkles

1 ice-cream wafer

red and yellow fruit straps

coloured gum balls

sugar star decorations

Equipment

25 x 45 cm (10 x 18 inch) cake board

small star cutter

Shaping the cake

Level the tops of the cakes. Cut a curve from the top of the bar cake. Arrange the cakes on a cake board in a figure nine, joining the edges with buttercream.

Icing the cake

Divide the buttercream into six even amounts. Leave one portion white, tint one portion black and tint the others four shades of blue, from light to dark. Spread the buttercream over the cakes, starting with the lighter colours at the bottom and moving up to the darker ones at the top. Blend the colours at the edges.

Decorating the cake

Roll out half the sugarpaste until it is 2 mm (1/8 inch) thick. Cut out star shapes with a small star cutter or small sharp knife. Cut a circle for a planet.

To make the rocket, slice one side of the cone off so it can sit flat. Spread the rocket with white buttercream and roll it in the dragees and sprinkles. Carefully fill in any gaps that are left. To make the wings, cut a wafer in half on the diagonal and decorate as above. Sit the rocket's body halfway along the straight part of the nine and slide a wafer wing under each side.

Cut the fruit straps into thin 'flames' and a thin strip for the ring around the planet. Add the 'flames' and gum balls. Sprinkle the rocket with sugar star decorations. As the final touch, add the stars, planet and planet's ring.

Leave the ring cake whole and cut a curve from the top of the bar cake, so that it will fit against the ring.

Arrange the cakes on the board in the shape of a number nine and join the edges together with buttercream.

Slice off one side of the cone and then spread with buttercream. Roll in the dragees and sprinkles.

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